

# Good Journalism Research Makes for Good Journalism Education

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It is the central assumption of this lecture, that you can only educate journalists in a sound way, if you know as much as possible about the formation and the state of journalism. For that reason, (empirical) research is essential. Preparing young people for journalism means to check out what the working conditions in the media are and how the characteristics and attitudes of the news people are changing. The young aspirants, who pursue a career in the news business, must know what to expect and whether they feel capable for that. In other words: Good journalism research makes for good journalism education.

Built-in problems of journalism education are grounded in the fact, that there has mostly been a time lag between establishing the curricula and doing research on the occupation. In the U.S., f. e., where the first journalism schools had been established since 1908, empirical research started at the end of the 1930s. One of the pioneer studies was Leo Rosten's survey on the Washington correspondents in 1937. In Germany, however, media and journalism research on the one hand and debates about the institutionalization of the journalism education at universities on the other started simultaneously, shortly before the First World War began. The realization of the pioneer project failed as well as the attempt to establish journalism schools at German Universities. It took more than sixty years to put the subject again on the agenda.

Let's go back to the roots at first. There's a good reason for that because journalism research is celebrating its centenary this October. Exactly 100 years ago, in 1910, the famous Max Weber, one of the founders of the social sciences, presented a complete research program on the conditions and situation of media and journalism at the first German Convention of Sociology in Frankfurt/Main. **[chart: Weber]** This research program was elaborate and comprehensive with respect to the relevant research topics in this field and therefore it is still worth being carefully respected nowadays.

Some time ago we have suggested a so-called 'context model of journalism research' that became the starting point and research frame for a number of empirical studies (cf. Weischenberg 2004 [1992]). It distinguishes between four *contexts*: the norms (media systems), structures (media structures), functions (media functions) and roles of journalism (media actors) and integrates all subjects journalism research focuses on. It's emphasis lays on institutional constraints, aspects of news selection and particularly the characters and attitudes of the journalists, of course. **[chart: Context Model]**

If you adapt this model to Weber's outline you see that his subjects and research questions include most of the problems empirical studies have been concerned with during the last decades. The precise questions and the methodological suggestions of his program are still impressive today – besides the differences in terms of terminology. So, f. e., we nowadays would prefer the terms 'recruitment' and 'socialization' of journalists instead of 'selection' and 'adaptation'. As role theory was not yet developed at that time Weber did not mention journalists' role perceptions, which has become a prominent research topic in journalism research, but since the 1970s. **[chart: Press Investigation]**

Weber's unique project contained questions of

- dependencies between journalists and their informants,
- institutional influences on journalists' work and of journalistic professionalization,
- the quality of journalistic coverage,
- relevant characteristics of journalists,
- and even of media effects.

Furthermore his outline featured the well-known problems concerning the economic base of newspapers, which at that time did – and still does – jeopardize not only newspaper journalism but journalism at all. Weber also addressed central aspects of journalism education as the perception and definition of the vocation and subjects of journalistic practice. Eventually, he provided concise (methodological) suggestions to deal with almost all questions the modern media world raises. (cf. Weber 1911)

The German-American communication scholar Hanno Hardt (1979: 183 f.) evaluates Weber's project by stating: **[chart: quote 1]**

“His ideas [...] form a comprehensive agenda for press and mass communication research; they anticipated many developments in the research patterns as they developed particularly in the United States some decades later.“

Weber's aim of his vast and fundamental project was the disenchantment ('Entzauberung') of the world of media by doing research on journalists (cf. Weber (1968 [first 1919])). This was suggested to be done in terms of scientific research, as he had outlined in his methodology of science ('Wissenschaftslehre'), which still has a strong influence on contemporary science discourses (cf. Weber 1988 [1922]).

Most important: He insisted on cooperation with media practitioners for the purposes of research and particularly on international *comparisons*, both of which are very modern and relevant aspects with regard to social research today. The sociologist Alan Sica (2004: 7), who is well-known for his studies on Weber's oeuvre, postulates: **[chart: quote 2]**

„Weber's methodological basis for social analysis lies principally within the practice of comparison. [...] His ambition for cross-cultural knowledge knew no real limits [...].“ (Sica 2004: 7)

Weber took into account almost the complete field of research, for which communication scholars feel responsible today. That includes first and foremost the power relations in the production of statements, the institutional influences, the professional development of journalism, the aspects of journalistic quality, the characteristics of the actors and the media effects.

The ambitious project on media and journalism failed for several reasons, however. Weber's research ideas could neither be realized by himself nor by somebody else at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. World War I, financial shortages and in particular his abruptly disordered relationship to the press (because of a legal dispute with a newspaper, cf. Hennis 1998: 109) stopped the implementation of the research project. Though Weber's ideas were not immediately realized, but they still have strong effects on many international journalism research projects.

We have collected around 1.700 empirical studies on journalism all over the world, which we're going to analyze with respect to Weber's influences to look for the marks he has left on journalism research during the past 100 years. At first glance you can see that Max Weber asked the right questions that have been asked in many studies since then to find out what makes journalism tick. They refer particularly

- to the imperatives on journalism such as economic, political, organizational und technological constraints,
- to news selection und several influences from outside journalism (as the public sphere and public relations)
- and, last but not least, to journalists characteristics, attitudes and working conditions.

Our project aims to paradigmatically show the ways in which Weber's ideas have influenced these research projects. At the same time it asks which kinds of research are needed to teach journalism at universities and in which ways we can learn from each other through international comparative analysis.

We've already learned from our study that it took a long way till journalism researchers remembered Weber's sophisticated proposals. In Germany, after World War II communication research had to recover from the ideological demands of the Nazi regime. Nevertheless, it took up its tradition as a historical and humanistic discipline rather than a social scientific discipline. Not before the late 1960s did both research and journalistic practice change their topics. Eventually journalism was considered a profession that journalists can learn and train and which is not just a natural gift.

Due to the establishing of journalism education at the university journalism research in the Western part of Germany was now interested in the professional structures of their research object concerning its subjective dimension (journalists' role perceptions and political attitudes etc.) as well as its objective dimension (structure of newsrooms, autonomy of journalists etc.) (cf. Scholl/Weischenberg 1998, Weischenberg et al. 1998, Weischenberg et al. 2006, Weischenberg/Malik 2008). In numerous empirical studies researchers examined then "what journalists think and how they work" (Kepplinger 1979) and considered specific research questions of whether certain journalistic roles – such as sports reporters, or local reporters, or edi-

tors-in-chief – and gender exert an influence on role perceptions or on working conditions. The topics in the objective dimension included observations of the structures of media organizations within the context of macro-media developments (media system).

In the 1980s computerization of the newsrooms became relevant for journalists' editorial work, and its consequences were examined and discussed in journalism research (for an overlook see Weischenberg et al. 1998: 229f.). That was an important contribution to journalism education and its curricula, too. But although a secondary analysis conducted by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kommunikationsforschung (AfK) collected the parceled out results of numerous studies (cf. Weiß et al. 1977), the state of basic statistical data on the situation of journalism could only be considered deficient at the beginning of the 1990s compared with Max Weber's demanding and ambitious research project.

Previously American scholars had already begun to investigate journalism based on a representative sample. They replicated this kind of study several times since then (cf. Johnstone et al. 1976; Weaver/Wilhoit (1986, 1996); Weaver et al. 2007). Their surveys provided a reference for our own representative studies on journalism in Germany we've conducted in 1993 and 2005, respectively. Our purpose was a theory driven analysis of German journalism following system theoretical ideas developed by German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (cf. Görke/Scholl 2006) and taking up the empirical tradition of Max Weber's project (cf. Weischenberg et al. 1998).

Methodologically the project was based on a complex definition of the universe of German journalists and on a multi-stage stratified sampling procedure. It also took Weber's ideas of international comparability seriously and adapted parts of the U.S. questionnaire developed by several studies since the 1970s (cf. Johnstone et al. 1976; Weaver et al. 1986, Weaver et al. 1996).

The representative panel studies on journalism in the U.S., in Germany and elsewhere provided basic information that is of value for the situation and future of journalism education and its quality. The results demonstrate, f.e., that **[chart: Results]**

- journalism in general is changing dramatically,
- the 'average journalist' is growing older because many media have stopped recruitment,
- women are gaining ground in journalism but only in terms of quantity not in terms of formal power,
- journalists' attitudes with respect to their function and to their ethical behavior are stable over the years,
- and that journalism in general suffers from a sneaking decrease in professionalism (regarding f.e. the number of journalists and non-professional freelancers).

Journalism educators have to be aware of these and other aspects of the changing pre-conditions and information and media structures, because journalism is part of a respective society. Consequently, it depends on the social transformation processes. Journalism research has to observe, describe and analyze how these changes affect media production and the mentality of media actors. It tells us what kind of journalists a society requires to meet tomorrow's challenges.

A particular challenge to journalism research has been recognized and realized since the 1980s but has methodologically not been reflected until recently: the need for internationally comparative journalism research. In Germany it started with a comparison between British and German journalists' professional and political attitudes in the 1980s (cf. Köcher 1986), and continued with a study about journalists of five countries in the 1990s (cf. Donsbach/Patterson 2004) and with a cross-cultural comparison between 17 countries in the 2000s (cf. Hanitzsch 2008, 2009). Those and many other studies show that one has to distinguish the societal phenomenon of journalism from other communicative phenomena in a globalized world society (identification) and to observe its structural variety (diversification) (cf. Rühl 2008: 34, Weischenberg/Malik 2008: 163): **[chart: quote 3]**

„The growing number of comparative studies indicates that journalism and journalism research no longer operate within national or cultural boundaries. As international events such as war, terrorism, international conferences etc. gain more attention in the media around the globe, research has to examine the new complex networks and institutions that produce news.“ (Weaver/Löffelholz 2008: 8)

Obviously, there are still differences *between* various national journalism and newsroom cultures as well as increasing differences *within* the various segments of journalism. Summing up the latest developments it can be expected that journalism as a vocation and media coverage as a public service are going to shake up themselves simultaneously.

In order to assess the performance of journalism in society, journalism research is primarily depending on the method of *comparison*. That is, inter alia, what we can learn from Max Weber.

Sociologist Sica (2004: 1) puts Weber's merits for social research in general terms: **[chart quote 4]**

“Max Weber's social theory [...] continues to speak directly to our extant and emerging conditions of social life in a way that overshadows every other available large-scale theory. That is, analyzing contemporary life in industrialized societies by means of ideas conceived by Max Weber will bring one closer to a reliable understanding of the immediate future than will using the key ideas of any other social theorist or philosopher still being read with care.”

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