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Is there anybody out there? Crisis and Collaboration in Foreign Reporting

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The Morning Post actually sent out a man in early summer 1789 only for him to miss the fall of the Bastille, the opening salvo of the revolution, by a 'lamentable error of judgement'.

Kevin Williams: *International Journalism*, 2011

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Summary

This paper discusses the changing nature of foreign reporting on the basis of a survey of foreign correspondents in Danish news media.

The survey shows that the number of foreign-based staff correspondents has declined by one-third, from 60 in 1998 to 39 in 2012. In the three largest general interest newspapers, the number has dropped from 35 to 22. Since 1998, Africa, Latin America, South Asia and Eastern Europe have lost the presence of staff correspondents.

The decline in staff is accompanied by changes in the structure of foreign desks. The study identifies a shift from a fixed to a flexible structure. According to the foreign editors surveyed, they rely less on permanent foreign bureaus and more on freelancers, home-based reporters and *ad hoc* bureaus.

According to the editors and correspondents interviewed, increased emphasis is put on *enriched* content setting output apart from the online news stream. Correspondents are expected to guide news consumers and be brands, analysts and protagonists in news narration.

This points to dilemmas facing foreign reporting. Increased demands for enriched content and personal branding are at odds with the shift towards freelance positions, ad hoc postings and cost-cutting on the other. Among freelance correspondents there are some indications of a partial de-professionalization.

Unless robust alternatives to the traditional advertising-subscription model are implemented, the number of staff correspondents in newspapers is likely to continue declining. Currently, two-thirds of staff correspondents are employed by newspapers generally facing a declining readership for paid content. With current trends, it leaves foreign correspondent coverage – not generally available on free-access news sites – with a shrinking audience. In the short term it risks polarising the consumption of quality foreign reporting. In the longer term, it puts a significant proportion of Danish foreign news presence at risk.

This study suggests that there is a need to rethink the way foreign reporting is organised. Foreign reporting needs to internalise the shift from the traditional one-to-many mode of communication to a reality where online networks are a key feature of international news flows. *Networks* and *niches* are two dimensions along which alternative models of foreign reporting can be conceptualised.

The drive towards *niches* is a consequence of audience fragmentation. While specialised news operations within business and finance have been successful, the experience for general interest foreign news is less promising. Cooperation with NGOs, relying on grants and combining foreign reporting with PR entails the risk of journalism being hijacked by special interests. Identifying ways that high-value, low-reach content can be combined with low-value, high-reach journalism is a key challenge for foreign reporting entrepreneurs.

Such risks are one reason why foreign reporting can benefit from opening up the journalistic process. *Networked journalism* focuses on ways to involve crowds and colleagues from other news organizations. A case study of the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat exemplifies an experiment with open concepts of foreign reporting by systematically incorporating input from readers based abroad. In some cases this has connected foreign and domestic news reflecting global-local connections in the audience itself.

Cross-border cooperation between foreign reporters is not only required for journalism to keep pace with the internationalised nature of politics, business, environment and crime.

Finding ways of pooling journalistic resources is one way of providing qualified foreign reporting at a time of relentless cost cutting at foreign desks.

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1. Why is it burning?

"It is not enough to see that there is a fire. What's important is to know why it's burning." The voice-over, sounding out on prime time television, was accompanied by the crackle of distant machine gun fire and blurred images of soldiers rushing by. The television ad went on to promote the country's largest daily as "Denmark's international newspaper" with "more correspondents than any other".¹

That was in 1993. The advertising campaign hit the television screens in Denmark as armed conflict in Former Yugoslavia brought war back to the European continent. The ad highlighted not only massive historic events in Europe but also increased investment in international newsgathering in Danish news media. TV stations and newspapers were hiring more correspondents and dedicating new supplements to news from abroad. Foreign news was marketed as a parameter for competition, including for publicly funded broadcasters. Two decades later, a different kind of announcement was emerging from leading news media. In April 2012 the largest daily scrapped its supplement on foreign news - the flagship launched in the 1990s - in a "painful but necessary process".² In late 2010, Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR, closed its daily international news programme in the latest of a series of cost-cutting measures in the newsroom.³ The cuts at the foreign desk prompted claims that foreign news coverage was being squeezed out of prime time and reduced to "fillers and snapshots".⁴

This was hardly due to lack of events of magnitude. With the *Arab spring*, the euro-crisis and continuing war in Afghanistan, 2011 was described as a "peak year" for foreign news (Newman et al 2012).

Instead, structural factors are reshaping the framework within which foreign reporting is practised. The advertising-subscription model of newspapers is being challenged. A high-choice news environment is eroding the mass audiences for public broadcasters and newspapers. Social media, in a sense, allows anyone to be an "amateur foreign correspondent". How such factors are affecting foreign reporting and foreign correspondents is the key question of the present study. Clearly, the changes at foreign desks in Denmark are part a wider tendency within general interest foreign news (Sambrook 2010, Moore 2010, Williams 2011). In the words of American media scholar John Maxwell Hamilton, foreign reporting is being reshaped "with a wrenching swiftness not seen since the beginnings of the mass media penny press" (Hamilton 2009).

But there are important differences for foreign reporting between a large media market like the globalised English-language news sphere, and small media markets like those in the Nordic countries. By presenting new data on the trends in foreign news in Denmark, this

¹ Jyllands-Posten ad campaign. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7anFvZoxz8o>

² Jyllands-Posten closed the section "International". <http://mediawatch.dk/artikel/jp-nedlaegger-international-og-puls-som-tillaeg>

³ DR announced the closing of "DR2 Udland" in December 2010.

<http://www.dr.dk/DR2/DR2+Udland/Nyheder/2010/12/10/185901.htm>

⁴ According to the DR journalists' representative, Dines Boertmann in "Danish Broadcasting Corporation failing foreign news," Information 7/6/2009:

<http://www.information.dk/193581>

study aims to substantiate the debate on the development of foreign news in smaller media markets. This data is then compared to the most recent previous study of Danish foreign news desks that draws on a survey from 1998 (Holm et al 2000).

On the basis of this combined data, the study asks how foreign news in Denmark is adapting to this changing landscape. Based on interviews with foreign editors and foreign correspondents I suggest three dimensions of studying those shifts. They include the changing *structure*, such as a declining number of staff correspondents and an increasing number of freelancers, the effect on *content* of reporting and the changing *role* assigned to the foreign correspondent.

The final part of the study will focus on two aspects of the changing media landscape: *niches* and *networks*. Two case studies are considered. "N-Ost" is an exchange for foreign news about Eastern Europe aiming to fill a perceived gap in coverage by traditional news media. What has been termed 'networked journalism' opens possibilities for involving users in the editorial process, exemplified by the Helsingin Sanomat's Foreign Readers Panel.

Their experience is this: News consumers still want to know "why it is burning", and they are prepared to play their part in finding out.

2. A less golden age

Foreign correspondence has a natural history. Like a living creature, it has adapted over time to a changing environment in order to survive. (Cole and Hamilton, 2008: 798)

High costs, political impact and technological demands have made foreign reporting an outpost of journalism hit hard and early by changing commercial models and technological breakthroughs.⁵

That is probably one reason why the demise of the foreign correspondent has been predicted a number of times. When the telegraph spread its reach in the 19th century, the then editor of The Times of London was convinced that the requirement for “immediate reports” meant that there was no longer any reason for a newspaper to have permanent foreign correspondents (Williams, 2011: 54).

That forecast was not entirely accurate. But the telegraph did change the practice of foreign correspondence. It gave birth to a new format of news and transformed the role of the foreign correspondent, not unlike the way the decline of newspaper circulation or the upsurge of online and mobile devices is changing it today.

In recent years, those trends have been the focus of numerous surveys. In the US, the declining number of newspaper titles impacted the corps of foreign correspondents as early as two generations ago. According to media scholar William Dorman the number declined from an estimated 2,500 in 1945 to 430 in the mid 1970s (1986: 421).⁶ In 2010, a survey by the American Journalism Review found that 20 US news organisations had cut their foreign bureaus entirely since 1998. It put the number of foreign correspondents at 234, down from 307 in 2003 (Kumar, 2011).

In other countries, such as Denmark, trends have played out differently. When a team of media researchers mapped the Danish foreign desks in 1998 they reported finding a growing – not declining - branch of the news industry.

We see more and more coverage of foreign affairs. More foreign correspondents and stringers have been hired, the foreign desks have grown bigger and more space is allocated for the coverage. (Holm et al 2000: p. 9).

Several Danish newspapers expanded their foreign coverage in the 1990s fuelled by healthy profits and, in some cases, rising circulation. A similar tendency was visible in television news as an era of competition was ushered in by the introduction of a second public, mainly advertising-funded, TV channel. The survey from 1998 counted a total of 60 staff correspondents.

Some 15 years later the tone has changed again. In the words of Thomas Falbe, head of foreign news and politics and Danish broadcaster DR:

⁵ For an example of how foreign news shaped the early German press see Wilke, 1987.

⁶ Another survey found 141 foreign-based US newspaper in 2006, down from 188 in 2002 (Constaple 2007).

We saw a very hard time of decline since the early 2000s in terms of how many media platforms we serve, and how much pressure is put on quality.⁷

This chapter explores what happened to the structure of Danish foreign news desks in the fifteen years between these two statements and explains how we got there by giving a brief historical context.

2.1 From war reporting to newspaper wars

The 1897 war between Greece and Turkey was fought at the edges of the continent, but for readers of the Copenhagen newspapers it was never far away. The Politiken newspaper had deployed its own correspondent to cover the war in gripping and telegraphically updated detail. It was nothing less than a new era, Politiken claimed in an editorial, in which readers would no longer depend on second hand sources for their news of the world.

For the first time in the history of the Danish press, our reading audience learns about news of the great events of the world by direct telegrams. Until now the Danish readers have received all accounts via the world cities shaped by their different political views.⁸

One author of the telegrams in question was one of the pioneers of contemporary journalism in Denmark, Henrik Cavling (1858-1933). The later editor of the Politiken newspaper catered to readers in then novel genres of reportage and interview. He covered Danish volunteer fighters in the war, relayed diplomatic mishaps and described the suffering of civilians. The decision to deploy Cavling and other reporters to the Greco-Turkish war followed the gradual rise of the mass circulations newspapers from the second half of the 19th century. The coverage reflected this broader audience. Cavling's travels "should not be the work of a minute taker but an all-in experience," according to his newspaper. Many of his articles focused, unsurprisingly, on the perceived interests of the broad Danish public such as the fate of Greek King George who was of Danish origin.

As is evident from the quote above, Politiken also saw a marketing value in the investment. When, later that year, Cavling obtained an interview with the embattled ruler of Greece, his newspaper considered it such a scoop that special leaflets were handed out to Copenhageners headlined "King George speaks with our correspondent" (Meilby 2004: 59) even if the actual interview was – by current standards - without much substance.

The Greco-Turkish war marked a new development in Danish foreign news, as competing newspapers began sending prominent reporters to cover conflicts. Exclusive dispatches from dramatic world events increased readership. The correspondents were also expensive, however, and editors were more than willing to pool their resources to cut costs. In the Balkan war of 1912 Danish war reporter Franz von Jessen published dispatches simultaneously in Danish newspaper Berlingske Tidende, in the London Morning Post and in Paris-based Le Temps (Meilby 2004:142). Likewise, Danish newspapers continued to print stories from foreign partners.

In the following decades growing newspaper circulation and the competition from radio and television led to further expansion of general interest foreign reporting. From the 1930s

⁷ Interview with author

⁸ Politiken, April 30, 1897, quoted in Jensen, 1997: 43

newspapers began to employ permanent correspondents based abroad. From the 1950s Danish Radio began to build up its own network of (initially) freelance correspondents (Jensen 1997: 214). By 1967 Danish Broadcasting, DR, posted its first foreign correspondent abroad, in Washington, followed by London, Paris and Bonn. In 1975 a bureau was opened in Beirut and in 1977 in Moscow.⁹ Competition in television news further intensified from 1985 with the launching of a second public channel, TV2, which in turn hired its own team of foreign reporters.

Still, newspapers continued to employ the majority of foreign correspondents. A consolidation of the newspaper market and growth in advertising in national titles allowed for an expansion of foreign desks in the 1990s – even if total newspaper circulation began to decline from 1990. This expansion coincided with major events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, painful reforms in Eastern Europe and, again, war on the Balkan Peninsula. The 1990s saw a renewed attempts of refinement aimed at widening the appeal of foreign reporting. The previously mentioned study from 2000 found that more emphasis was being put on reportage, story-telling and human interest as opposed to the traditional "diplomatic reporting" (Holm et al 2000: 8). Experiments such as the Jyllands-Posten newspaper sending a 'journalistic exploration team' around the world produced mixed reactions with some seeing a decline of 'serious' reporting. Others argued that by reaching a non-traditional audience foreign reporting was "better than ever".¹⁰

The years of expansion came to an end in the beginning of the 2000s reflecting a wider slowdown in news media. The total number of journalists working in newspapers (and associated websites) was 2,350 in 1999 and declined to 1,950 in 2011 (Danish Union of Journalists 2012). A series of 'newspaper wars' for control of the no-pay newspapers market drained capital from publishers. Paid circulations continued to decline gradually and the ad market more rapidly. Public broadcaster DR also downsized its news staff, although for different reasons. License fee funding was partly redistributed. Coupled with a building budget overrun and regulations requiring outsourcing of programming, the total number of journalists in DR declined from 1,050 in 1999 to 850 in 2011. In the same period its main competitor, TV2, expanded total editorial staff from 600 to 750 (ibid).

Web-native media did not compensate for the overall loss. Employment in online media stagnated at a modest 150 in 2011 compared to 130 in 1999 including an absolute decline in the past four years.

2.2 Factors shaping foreign desks 1998-2012

The downsizing of traditional newsrooms, particularly in newspapers, concerns not only foreign reporting but reflect broader structural factors shaping an evolving eco-system of news in which traditional business models are being undermined (Newman et al 2012, Levy et al 2010). The following is a brief overview of the main factors shaping the framework for foreign news desks in Denmark.

Fragmentation of news consumption. Danish news consumers have moved from a low-choice to a high-choice environment for foreign news. An average news consumer in 1998 relied overwhelmingly on newspapers, radio news provided by public broadcaster DR and the main evening news programmes on TV. The same person in 2012 has a choice of many more

⁹ http://www.dr.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D0F84992-F0E6-4107-A2B2-72B6F35B42D4/264949/tva_41.pdf

¹⁰ <http://journalisten.dk/udland-i-udvikling>

TV and radio channels, including a 24 hour Danish language news channel, free newspapers distributed in public transport and, crucially, a torrent of information from online news sites increasingly accessed through news aggregators or spread through social media to mobile devices. 70 percent of the population consume news online, according to a recent survey (Schrøder et al, 2012). Viewership for the flagship evening news is declining, but TV is still the most popular source of news (86 percent of the population). Meanwhile, the reach of national paid newspapers, traditionally employing the majority of foreign correspondents, is declining sharply from roughly half the population in 2008 to one third in 2012 (ibid).

Erosion of cross-subsidies. The fragmentation is happening not only in news consumption but also in advertising. TV and especially newspapers have lost their role as intermediaries between advertisers and consumers. According to James Fallows of *The Atlantic* magazine: "Google has been the most powerful unbundling agent of all. It lets users find the one article they are looking for, rather than making them buy the entire paper that paid the reporter. It lets advertisers reach one customer who is searching for their product, rather than making them advertise to an entire class of readers" (Fallows, 2010). This has important repercussions for foreign reporting. When many newspapers in 1990s were opening new foreign bureaus, it was partly financed by other genres of journalism such as advertising-heavy newspaper sections dealing with real estate, cars and camping. Those kinds of cross-subsidies are drying up, raising the issue of whether foreign news can in fact pay its own way. The effects of this are exacerbated by cyclical factors, such as the economic crisis since 2008 and associated advertising downturn.

The rise of no-pay. If newspapers are losing readers in print, they are gaining readers online. All the main newspapers in Denmark are now reaching more users online than in their print editions (Schrøder et al, 2012: 13). Few, however, have been able to make a profit out of their online presence.¹¹ This has implications for foreign reporting too. Most newspapers in Denmark are restricting material produced by their correspondents to the paid print and e-paper editions. Thus, correspondent output is rarely available on newspaper websites. The foreign news on free sites is instead dominated by wire news and occasionally contributions by correspondents.¹²

Devaluing of international news. In the current global information flow, having a correspondent 'out there' is neither as exclusive nor, it can be argued, as valuable as it was when *Politiken* impressed readers by bringing them first hand accounts of the Greco-Turkish war in 1897. In the words of Richard Sambrook, "the information revolution has devalued the currency of mainstream foreign news" (2010: 8). On the other hand demand for foreign news appears to remain strong in Denmark. According to a recent study, 65 percent of Danish news consumers are "interested" in international news against 44 percent in the UK and 42 in the US (Levy et al 2012).

"Foreign foreign" news. Smaller countries like Denmark face particular effects from globalisation. The traditionally high proportion of the population learning foreign languages

¹¹ Leading tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* claim to be among those who do. <http://journalisten.dk/eb-tre-tips-til-den-fede-forside-p-nettet>

¹² As per May 2012. Several newspapers have announced plans to introduce flexible pay-wall models that may change the situation.

has been seen as an advantage. At the same time, this opens part of the news market to truly global competition. According to a survey by Schrøder et al (2012) Danes are indeed accessing more news in foreign languages, above all in English. 27 percent of respondents said that they regularly read international news sources online against 21 in 2008. At the same time, perhaps reflecting the rise of online media, the number of respondents watching foreign TV channels has dropped from 19 percent to 14.

2.3 Quantitative survey: A new balance

The following section presents data on staff foreign correspondents based abroad as of May 2012. Ideally, a survey of foreign desks should include other contributors to foreign reporting, such as freelancers and home-based travelling reporters as well as content analysis. In that sense the present study is merely explorative.

Data on staff correspondents, however, may still give a valuable indication of trends within foreign reporting. Permanent correspondents represent a large investment for news organisations. The geography and size of this network may, especially if seen over time, tell us about priorities of foreign desks.¹³ In this case, a longitudinal view is made possible by comparison of data with the previous survey of Danish foreign news desks from 1998 (Holm et al. 2000).

The survey is based on information provided by Danish news media with staff correspondents. Like the 1998 survey, it reflects what news organisations themselves consider "full-time staff, foreign-based correspondents".¹⁴

The overall findings of the survey are specified in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Staff foreign correspondents in newspapers, TV, radio and news agencies 1998-2012

	1998	2012
Newspapers	38	26
TV and radio	17	12
News agencies	5	1
Total	60	39

Some main trends can be observed:

¹³ Definitions in similar surveys vary. In 2011 the American Journalism Review (AJR) for the first time began to include freelance contract writers in their count of foreign correspondents.

¹⁴ This includes four newspapers, the two public broadcasters and the largest news agency: Jyllands-Posten, Berlingske, Politiken, Dagbladet Information, Danish Broadcasting Corporation, TV2 and Ritzaus Bureau. They were asked to describe the situation as of May 1, 2012.

Data from 1998 is from the survey conducted by Lars Møller, Hans Henrik Holm and others. This data is similarly provided by foreign desks and reflects their definition of "regular, full-time foreign correspondents" (Holm et al 2000: 52). There may be inaccuracies in the figures given, according to Lars Møller (private correspondence with author)

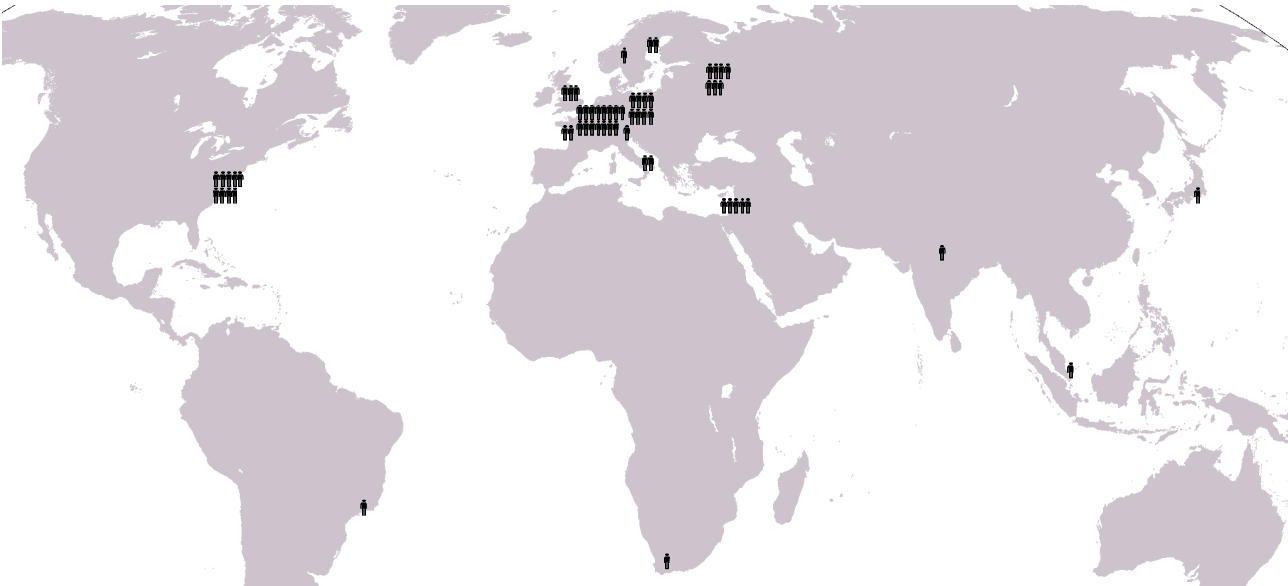
Fewer staff correspondents: Comparing the surveys from 1998 and 2012, the total number of staff correspondents has declined by one third, from 60 to 39. The decline affects all media branches surveyed, including newspapers, broadcasters and the largest Danish news agency.

Weaker but still dominant newspapers: In absolute numbers, newspapers have borne the brunt of the cuts. The three largest quality papers, Jyllands-Posten, Berlingske and Politiken, have seen their share reduced from 35 in 1998 to 22 in 2012. Two smaller newspapers have shed foreign based correspondents altogether in the period surveyed. One of them has closed shop, while another now syndicates foreign news from its parent company. Apparently due to a switch from a stringer to a staff model, niche newspaper Information records an increase from none to four correspondents compared to the 1998 survey. Overall, newspapers still employ twice as many staff foreign correspondents as the two main broadcasters.

Broadcasters rely on home-based reporters. Broadcasters have cut back on foreign-based staff at a rate comparable to newspapers (from 17 to 12). They increasingly rely on sending out home-based news teams to cover major world news. Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) states that it has 24 home-based foreign news reporters, while TV2 puts the number at 12. For both broadcasters, some of these are dedicated “travelling reporters”. Additionally, the reduction in the number of DR correspondents reflects that the broadcasting cooperation used to have two correspondents in many locations with one dedicated to radio and another to television. This system was abandoned in the mid-2000s.

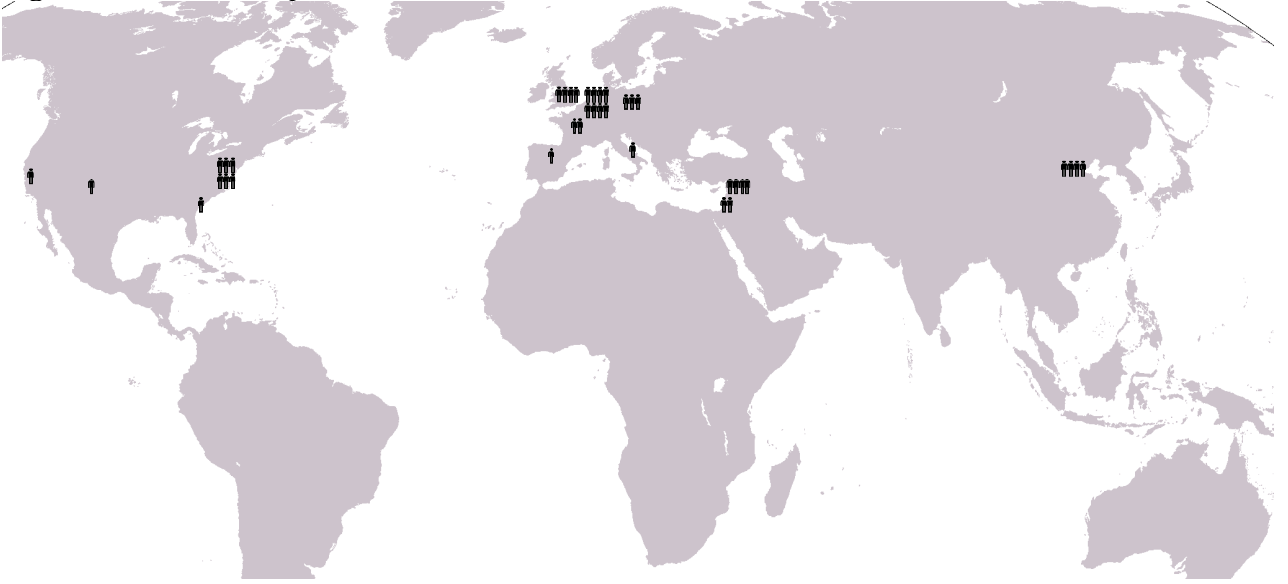
Less Europe, more China. The hot spots of news have changed in the past 15 years if measured by correspondent stations. Europe has seen the most dramatic decline from 41 to 19 staff correspondents. Cities seeing the largest declines are Brussels (from 15 to 8), Moscow (from 7 to none) and Berlin (8 to 3). The decline in Washington from 9 to 6 correspondents is balanced out by correspondents based in other US cities. China is the fastest growing newcomer (none to 4), while the Middle East sees a constant level of attention, although some correspondent posts previously in Jerusalem have moved to Beirut.

Figure 1. Staff Correspondents, 1998



Source: Holm et al, 2000

Figure 2. Staff Correspondents, 2012



Concentration in fewer news centres: The decline in absolute number of correspondents is accompanied by reduction of the overall number of correspondent stations. In 1998 there were 16 cities with staff correspondents and 13 in 2012. If we exclude the two major news centres, the US and Brussels, the decline is from 14 to 9. Additionally, the thinning away of single correspondents has left Africa, Latin America, South Asia and Eastern Europe without any staff correspondents.

Importance of freelancers: Data from the three major newspapers indicate that freelancers play a growing role. If we consider regularly contributing stringers as a de facto part of the correspondent pool, the proportion of freelancers is between half and one fifth of the total, according to a sample from the three biggest newspapers.¹⁵ Several of these freelancers are contributing to newspapers at the frequency of - or even above - that of staff correspondents. This indicates an important change in the affiliation model that should be taken into account when gauging the overall foreign reporting workforce.

¹⁵ Newspaper stringers are here defined as foreign-based freelancers who have published an average of at least two foreign affairs stories a week in the period from 01/01/2012 until 01/05/2012 in Jyllands-Posten, Berlingske and Politiken as registered in the news database Infomedia.

3. Adapting to change

On a December morning in 2011 Matilde Kimer headed for Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport. A three-week stint covering the Russian elections was over for the travelling reporter of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR. Kimer had made her way through the country by train to interview voters, filed radio news items and done live updates as results were coming in on election night. In the end, the party headed by Russia's long-time ruler, Vladimir Putin, won an expected victory. When she boarded the plane, the election news cycle seemed to be over. As it turned out, it was only beginning. The day when Kimer left Russia, demonstrators hit the street to protest alleged vote-rigging. Surprising pundits and politicians alike, initially small demonstrations grew big. Three days after Kimer left Russia, the streets of Moscow were filled with the largest demonstration the Russian capital since the twilight days of the Soviet Union. They came to pose an unprecedented challenge to one of the most influential leaders in the world.

"[The news] was unexpected," says Matilde Kimer. "If I had been living there [DR closed the Moscow bureau in 2007], we would of course have been able to cover it more. We only really got onto that part of the story in February."

In the end Kimer did cover the Moscow protests that week by going live from a street in suburban Copenhagen to explain the protests to viewers. An imperfect solution but not an uncommon one as news media seek to adapt their foreign reporting reach to changing circumstances and limited resources.

There are upsides to this flexibility as well. As TV stations and newspapers introduce a more elastic network of non-permanent correspondents they can adapt quicker to rapidly changing news hotspots and potentially make better use of resources (Williams 2011, Sambrook 2010, Ricchiardi 2006). While normally concentrating on Russia, Matilde Kimer had for months also been covering the escalating conflict in Libya and the Arab Spring earlier that year. This was at a time when most news from Russia was probably unlikely to make the prime time news anyway.

These are some of the dilemmas that will be explored in this chapter. Through a small qualitative survey consisting of interviews with 14 foreign news practitioners (5 foreign editors, 9 sub-editors and correspondents), I will discuss how Danish foreign news desks are being shaped by and adapting to the main trends identified, and how this is affecting foreign coverage.¹⁶

The discussion will be organised along three dimensions each representing an aspect of news production. 1) the *structure* of the foreign news desks, 2) the expressed goals for the journalistic *content*, 3) and the *role* assigned to the foreign correspondent.

The survey suggests that the structural dimension is characterized by a shift from *fixed* to *flexible* and that the intended focus of journalist-intensive output is moving from an *extensive* to a more narrow but *enriched* understanding of the news agenda. Likewise, the foreign news reporter has lost the last remnants of classical role as *gatekeeper* and is expected to serve instead as a *guide* to news consumers.

¹⁶ As representative of news organisations, foreign editors are named in the survey. Correspondents and subeditors are not named, since some interviewees asked for anonymity to be able to speak about working conditions more freely.

Table 2. Dimensions of Foreign News Production

	Previous	Current
Structure	Fixed	Flexible
Content	Extensive	Enriched
Role	Gatekeeper	Guide

3.1 Structure – from fixed to flexible

In 2008, the largest Danish business daily Børsen, previously relying on a network of freelance correspondents for foreign news, ended cooperation with reporters in New York, Paris, London, Germany and Brussels. The paper announced that it would instead “centralize the foreign coverage in Copenhagen”¹⁷. It was a drastic change, but it reflected a trend that can be observed most Danish news media between 1998 and 2012. Both newspapers and broadcasters have experienced significant staff reductions with important implications for the way foreign reporting is produced.

It was really tough for the foreign desk from 2007-2010. There were three or four years when there were cuts all the time - even while we had to produce output for an increasing number of platforms.¹⁸

In some cases staff has been replaced by freelancers. In 1998 the Berlingske newspaper had 11 foreign-based staff correspondents. By 2012 Berlingske still boasted 10 foreign-based reporters. But by now only six were staff, the rest stringers.

Cost-cutting has also the conditions for remaining staff correspondents. Correspondents report that travel budgets, especially for newspapers, have been cut significantly. Previous supplements like tuition fee for children and housing have in some cases been reduced or removed completely. According to the newspaper Dagbladet Information, foreign correspondent salaries are adjusted for lower tax rates abroad and exclude pension payments.¹⁹ Other reduced-salary principles have been applied in several of the largest news organisations, according to correspondents. In the words of one sub-editor:

Since 2000 I would say that being posted abroad is no longer attractive for people with a family - at least if the partner cannot get a good job there. There are those who don't become correspondents because they cannot afford it.

The inner mechanics of newspapers and broadcasters are also changing as news organizations have tried to raise efficiency in news editing and management²⁰. Until 2009 Berlingske had four sub-editors dedicated to planning and editing foreign news. In 2012, news planning was handled by a deputy foreign editor, while editing had been merged with domestic news.

¹⁷ "Børsen tightening the screws", business.dk, 5/11/2012, <http://www.business.dk/media/dagbladet-boersen-strammer-skruen>

¹⁸ Thomas Falbe, foreign editor, DR.

¹⁹ Lotte Folke Kaarsholm, foreign editor, Information, correspondence with author.

²⁰ In both DR and Berlingske, the foreign editor also heads the political desk.

Such reorganizations have cut costs, but in many cases resulted in earlier deadlines and less time for editing in many newspapers. Coverage is increasingly planned several days ahead. One correspondent recounts:

So when I called with a story this Sunday at 1pm, it was already too late for making the next day's paper, and they suggested doing the story for paper two days later. But you can't hold on to a piece of news for 72 hours.

These are partly contradictory trends. While late-day flexibility in content has decreased in print news, the argument made in terms of structure is towards more manoeuvrability and ability to adapt to shifting news agendas. Not least in broadcasting, permanent bureaus have been closed down, while the use of travelling reporters and stringers has increased. Jakob Vissing from TV2:

On the one hand we are keeping a few bureaus where it's really important. On the other we are more interested in spending our money where we get payback, in places where we are really getting some output. We get more bang for the buck by going for ad hoc bureaus than by keeping a presence in places where really not much is going on.²¹

For several years, one such 'ad hoc' bureau was established by public broadcaster TV2 in Kabul, Afghanistan to provide coverage of the military campaign involving Danish soldiers. As the attention later shifted to the Middle East, the Kabul bureau was closed down. According to TV2 having a more flexible deployment model became more important after the launching of the first 24-hour news channel in Denmark in 2006. According to the management, the channel has increased the station's airtime dedicated to foreign news and directed increased investment to the foreign desk. Still, TV2 has fewer staff correspondent based abroad than in 1998, according to this survey. The station has invested in home-based travelling correspondents, temporary bureaus and partner agreements that allow TV2 to use material (and in some cases correspondents) from CNN, Sky News, Nordic channels and correspondents of the Danish newspapers.

We often use the correspondents of the newspapers and the correspondents of other [foreign] TV stations. (...) In this way, through partners, we have access to a sea of correspondents.

Cooperation between news organizations has become an integrated part of the way many news media work with foreign news. Another example is the initial co-funding of the Kabul bureau between the Politiken newspaper and TV2. Likewise, the Norwegian war correspondent Åsne Seierstad covered the conflict in Iraq co-funded by three Nordic newspapers. Such pooling of resources is happening not least because of economic strain. According to one sub-editor:

We cannot afford to have permanent correspondents in war zones. They cost more than our C.E.O. (...) I think in some cases there has to be a multi-affiliation-model so that correspondents work for several news outlets. We cannot expect to fund our own people on the ground everywhere.

²¹ Jakob Vissing, foreign editor, TV2.

Newspapers are also increasing flexibility by using more semi-permanent correspondents in connection with major events such as US elections or in order to cover certain topics such as the euro-crisis. In 2012 Politiken announced it would deploy a non-permanent correspondent to Spain to give culture coverage more international perspective.

This gradual shift from a fixed pool of staff correspondents to an ad hoc network impacts on the news gathering mechanism. The ad hoc network makes it easier for news organizations to adapt to rapidly changing news agendas. At least potentially, it makes for more efficient use of resources by investing in journalism rather than infrastructure.

At the same time, it comes with the risk of creating a more narrowly focused news spotlight with intense coverage of 'hot spots' while other regions end up as 'white spots' on the map. Not having staff in a certain region makes it easier to simply ignore it, according to the Foreign Editor of DR.

When you have to sell a story in the newsroom, presence on the ground is a crucial argument. Presence was important to us when we tried to keep focus on Iraq some years ago. If you just have the news wires and the footage, it's very easy to reject the story.

Another effect of not having permanent correspondents in a region is that it becomes more difficult for reporters to become specialists, according to one travelling staff reporter.

There is a sense of nuance and basic understanding that you cannot sustain if you are flying in and out, and if just the week before you were covering a war in the Middle East or drug lords in Mexico. (...) We are often asked, "What are people there thinking?" Well, how can I know if landed two hours ago and had time to speak to no-one but the taxi driver?

Perhaps surprisingly, online news seems to have played a modest role in shaping the structure of foreign desks. Newspapers Politiken and Jyllands-Posten have experimented with US-based correspondents dedicated to doing online news updates, partly to take advantage of the time difference when covering late night news. These experiments have so far been only temporary.

3.2 Content – from extensive to enriched

The news cycle is accelerating. A "maelstrom" or a "torrent of information" are phrases that come up when reporters and editors asked to characterise the foreign news output emerging since the turn of the millennium. The 'torrent' is also becoming more complex with the constant online news flow, mainly fed by news agencies, increasingly merging on social media with non- or semi-journalistic output from bloggers, NGOs, stakeholders and governments. This was underlined in a recent report on news 'ecology' in Danish media. During a single week in 1999 the survey mapped 32,000 news pieces. When the survey was repeated in 2008 that number had risen to 75,000 (Lund et al, 2009). It also identified an increasing number of stories that had either only one quoted source or none at all.

This acceleration is keenly felt at foreign news desks - in part as a loss of agenda influence. According to one sub-editor:

When I think back to the coverage of the US primaries in 2008, our print edition could actually set the agenda about what was seen as important [by Danish news media]. We had two correspondents over there who were getting the stories right, and the electronic media would often be following that lead. We can't do that anymore. There is such a news flow on all kinds of platforms that nobody sets the agenda like that now.

According to DR foreign news editor, Thomas Falbe:

Because the competition is so much fiercer today, because there are so many alternatives vying for people's attention, so much more than five or seven years ago, there is a pressure to put all the difficult stuff on a niche channel and let the popular news shows be popular.

This increased competition for attention explicitly demands foreign desks to justify more clearly their expensive operation as well as their airtime and newspaper inches. When so much information is spread fast and often for free, it puts heavy pressure on news platforms with finite space – such as newspapers and evening television news - to “add value” to the hard news the basics of which will already be known by many news consumers. In the interview for this survey, three strategies for enriching foreign news content were mentioned most often. They are what I will call *exclusivity*, *agenda polarisation* and *presentation*.

Exclusivity is what differentiates foreign desk material from the churning news mill online, according to foreign editors. Printing material from the agencies in the newspaper, previously a much used backup strategy, is now considered less attractive by many editors because it is, by definition, not exclusive. According to some editors, exclusivity is seen as increasingly important in a crowded market for news. Says foreign editor of Politiken, Michael Jarlner:

If you buy our newspaper you are paying for our way of prioritizing and presenting news, and it is not – or I hope not – the same as our competitors, because if it is, then we don't have a *raison d'être*.

There is also another more practical side of exclusivity: Increased competition for space. While the quantity of news items online is increasing, the space allocated for foreign news in newspapers is declining, according to Jarlner:

In the old days it would cause a drama if we only had eight pages [for foreign news]. Today I would say 'no thanks' if they offered me eight pages, because it will be too sloppily edited. (...) So it greatly increases the demands for the editors to choose the right stories.

It also gives readers a more narrow coverage, says one foreign correspondent.

I would estimate that our newspaper inches have been halved in the past ten years. It has really gone down. (...) They have to adapt and save money and I understand that on the one hand. But I wish they wouldn't present it as a 'synergy effect'. That's bullshit.

Cutting back on paper is typically the consequence of adapting the size of the newspaper to the declining number of ads. The result is fewer pages, in which content is generally more

concentrated. Some foreign editors emphasize that coverage consequently should move in a more 'magazine-like' or 'feature-like' direction. Some newspapers have focused on fewer but longer articles. This potentially raises the bar for the material that makes it into the newspaper, which is another reason for keeping correspondents on the ground, according to foreign editor Flemming Rose from Jyllands-Posten.

[After the launch of 24 hours television news] some people were saying that it didn't make such a big difference if newspapers wrote their stuff from Cairo or from Copenhagen. I think that is a misunderstanding. I think that for the foreign coverage it is more important than ever to be present where things are happening. There is nothing that compensates for presence. It adds value.

More competition and less space amplifies the tendency to cover the biggest stories in more detail at the cost of smaller news developments, or what we might call **agenda polarisation**. Perhaps making a virtue of necessity, editors emphasize this as a natural role for newspaper in an information-rich society. Michael Jarlner from Politiken says:

It's our whole philosophy to make a much more concentrated newspaper. (...) We don't want to give readers a bad conscience because they don't have time to read it all. If they want more they just go online anyway. We are there to prioritise. The internet is eating itself up because it doesn't.

The need to prioritise space and resources requires foreign desks to marginalise and in many cases leave out the less spectacular news developments. One example is the coverage of major party conferences in Germany and Britain that used to be a staple of foreign coverage in broadsheet newspapers – now only covered in extraordinary situations. According to one sub-editor, there is a shift from national frames to a regional or continental perspective.

In the future you are not just a Germany correspondent, you are a European correspondent. You should write about Europe in one way or another.

One correspondent says:

Five or ten years ago you could expect as a reader that the newspaper gave you a pretty full picture of Germany, that you could follow the most important events in countries like Germany, Britain, France.

This is not the case anymore, the correspondent argues. One sub-editor agrees that smaller news developments are generally squeezed out more often, partly due to fewer dedicated foreign pages.

I think that sometimes black holes appear. There are things that are really important, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, elections in the US, the euro-crisis, and those agendas can easily push other events out.

At the same time, it is argued that the shift from *extensive* to *enriched* has improved foreign reporting by focusing less on diplomacy, hard politics or specific countries where a

correspondents happens to be.²² In some cases, output has become more focused on the news consumer, says Foreign editor Flemming Rose:

I think the quality of foreign news has improved even if it is under pressure in some ways in terms of resources and space. As a total mechanism there is much more attention on what the correspondents are doing. There are fewer slips.

More detailed data on news consumption and attempts to stop circulation or audience from declining further have also eroded some of the previous “elite” tendencies in foreign reporting, according to several editors. On television, increased competition between news programmes has put more focus on ratings, according to Thomas Falbe, foreign editor at DR:

The basic challenge has not been in resources, but in foreign affairs being pushed out from evening news and radio news. (...) The earthquake in Haiti [in 2010] was a major catastrophe with regional consequences, but a lot of the coverage in the end was about two Danes, whom everybody [in the media] was looking for. It is a quite clear trend, a kind of provincialism, I think. (...) The biggest nut to crack is how to hold on to professionalism and precision and still keep the prioritisation on a platform that has to be broad and appeal broadly.

3.3 Role – from gatekeeper to guide

One example of attempting to broaden the appeal foreign news is TV2 show “Korrespondenterne” (The Correspondents) which follows correspondents as they work in the field. The show includes everyday life stories as well as dramatic scenes of armed conflict, poverty or life in refugee camps. In terms of ratings the show has been a success for the foreign desk, says TV2 foreign editor, Jakob Vissing.

The show spreads foreign news out of the usual frame and makes it come alive for a lot of people who maybe usually don’t follow documentaries.

At the same time, it has caused some debate about the risk of moving the focus from the subject matter to the correspondents – one of whom made the tabloid news himself when he was shown crying after visiting victims of a famine in Somalia. Using the correspondent as a protagonist in news makes news more accessible while telling an important story, says Vissing.

We use the correspondent as a proxy, instead of the case person. This creates better understanding, factually and emotionally. So yes, we need the foreign correspondent. He is our tour-guide.

As noted in previously, marketing correspondents has been part of foreign reporting from the earliest days. But there may be factors that are putting more emphasis on this aspect as illustrated when discussing the shift towards *presentation, agenda polarisation and exclusivity* in content. Foreign editors claim to be putting more emphasis on *presenting, interpreting and curating* information and other aspects of what could be called the *guide-correspondent*.

²² The same point has been made by Cozma, 2010

The list of requirements for such a correspondents is long, according to Thomas Falbe:

They need to be journalists who can walk on three legs. (...) They should have an enormous specialist knowledge and trustworthiness. (...) They should be able to operate all available media platforms. (...) And a third thing: An ability to break through to the audience, a kind of factor X (...) they have to be someone that people like.

Kristian Mouritzen from Berlingske:

There are gigantic demands put to them (...) [Foreign correspondents] need to be global thinkers. They need to be able to track global developments, and to see details of shifts of power in their country and lift those up because they have a wider significance. (...) They should be multi-taskers able to handle social media, doing sharp analytical pieces and produce the perfect three lines for social media and the web.

Communications technology has played a significant role in increasing demands for output. Says one television correspondent:

Now every last drop is sucked out of the correspondents. Often it's updates with half hour intervals if you're in the field.

Technology has also, to some extent, cut back previous inefficient or even 'dirty' practices "offered by communications distance" (Williams, 2011). Going 'off base', i.e. not being reachable by the home desk or picking up 'easy stories' from local media has become more rare. According to one sub-editor:

At that time correspondents could rely on local press and not even quote the sources very precisely because nobody could check them anyway. Now you are under total supervision, and it demands that you deliver more unique journalism.

The trend towards a guide-correspondent involves foreign correspondents being branded and marketed more clearly, such as in the show "Korrespondenterne". This has increased internal competition as well and caused some controversy at foreign desks, says Thomas Falbe.

It causes some friction. It is part of some serious discussions that we are going through, because we are prioritising some who are good in the field and some who are at home with regular shifts.

In newspapers the branding is seen through the use of byline photos, personal columns and newspapers organizing readers' meetings with the correspondents. Branding is in some cases accompanied by multi-functionality. Thus, one newspaper has dedicated one of two US correspondents to hosting a weekly radio show on an affiliated radio station. Still, the multi-functionality is seen most clearly among freelance correspondents. While some stringers have a de facto full time affiliation with one media outlet, most are working for several outlets and several media platforms. Some are also engaged in giving talks and doing tour-guiding.

As correspondents we have to be flexible. (...) If I do a good interview for the newspaper for 30 or 40 minutes, I never use all of it anyway (...) but by making a different version of the story for radio I use the material more efficiently and get paid better. (...) In a wider sense as contemporary freelance correspondents we also have to think about other areas of income like tour-guiding and giving talks. (...) I don't regret this. I think it makes me a better journalist.

This has been the case with staff correspondents as well. At least one newspaper has marketed travels for subscribers with correspondents giving tours or presentations during such trips. For some freelancers non-journalistic work has become the mainstay of their income. One freelancer, who began as a full-time correspondent for a Danish newspaper, has shifted to mostly PR-work for private companies, tour-guiding and managing a website.

TV channels regularly call and expect that I do a Q&A without getting paid. It's lousy and unacceptable. (...) It's shows a major crisis in foreign reporting, like they want to detach us from the profession. (...) There are many important stories that are not told anymore [because of lack of investment in foreign reporting].

Another experienced freelance correspondent has stuck exclusively with journalism but finances reportage trips by doing better-paid routine journalism for most of the year.

When everything is settled after such a trip, it only pays the expenses. But I do it because I think they are important stories that should be told. Maybe they are some of the most important stories that I have ever done. But economically speaking, it doesn't make sense.

While it is hard to say how widespread such a practice is, it was mentioned by several reporters interviewed. It potentially points towards a part de-professionalization of foreign reporting blurring the line between journalism and volunteer work. Such trends touch upon several potential paths for foreign news adapting to changing circumstances, as we will discuss in the following chapter.

4. Towards Niches and Networks

*Cover what you do best. Link to the rest.
Jeff Jarvis*

Foreign reporting is only beginning to adapt to a changing eco-system of news. News consumers no longer have to rely on correspondents or news organisations to provide peepholes to foreign lands via satellite images, newspapers articles or sound bites from people on the ground. The flow of information from major events around the world is ubiquitous, unfiltered and taken for granted by social media users. News consumers mix and match, share and co-create, providing opportunities and pitfalls for foreign news professionals.

The Syrian civil war escalating in 2012 provided a vivid illustration. Video images of street battles were systematically broadcast from cell-phone cameras on the ground by members of armed groups and activists. Via websites such as Bambuser and Ustream the live images were beamed to internet users in any corner of the world. Uncut and unverified as it was, this raw footage became an important part of the mediated image of the conflict.²³ The quantity of available information – which no news organization could have gathered independently - put journalistic skills such as verification, prioritisation and providing context to an extreme test and illustrated that those functions are needed more than ever.

Indeed, it would be wrong to say that news consumers are collectively turning their back on news organisations online. Foreign news professionals continue to play a key role in the digital news flows. On social media they are often key nodal points around which information spreads and discussions evolves (Newman 2011, Greene 2012). But the role is changing. Foreign correspondents are no longer gatekeepers of foreign news. Traditional news organisations can no longer practise what has been termed ‘fortress journalism’ (Horrocks, 2009). News consumers navigate in a high-choice environment of foreign news in which citizen journalists, specialised information providers, governments, lobbyists and NGOs are all contributors to a metaphorical social media timeline.

As we have seen, this high-choice environment of foreign news has had far-reaching effects on foreign desks in terms of both practices and economy. It has weakened the economic foundations for professional foreign reporting by eroding mass audiences and advertising revenues. As we saw in the previous chapter, it has also increased demands for foreign correspondents to produce *enriched content*, be marketed as brands and area specialists - even if they are more likely to be freelancers, travelling reporters and reporting for a range of different media platforms. There are inherent contradictions in these trends, according to media scholar Hans-Henrik Holm.

We have seen a proletarianization of correspondents over time. They are being exploited more, have worse conditions and higher demands for

²³ Similarly, with a network of activists on the ground, partisan organisations such as the *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* set up quasi-news agencies widely quoted by traditional news media.

productivity, and this is not the way to go, because it undermines the stated ambition to deliver added value.²⁴

According to one TV news executive quoted by Hamilton and Jenner, “the on-going fragmentation of the information environment will put pressure on the business model that supports excellent journalism, including, and perhaps especially, foreign reporting” (Hamilton et al, 2004: 304). In particular this seems to be the case for general interest foreign news, such as classic broadsheet newspapers and prime time TV news.

At the same time it is pushing news organisations to change practices and in some cases open up. Many foreign correspondents are routinely using social media networks to gather, validate and discuss information in real time. This layered interaction has been termed “network journalism” (Heinrich 2011). News organizations are finding new ways of reaching and interacting with their audience through social media. A “World Online” can at least theoretically “democratize international relations by opening up the closed world of international journalism” (Williams 2011: 170). A bottom-up news ecology makes anyone an “amateur foreign correspondent” (Hamilton et al 2004: 311).

I will suggest that this double pressure is causing a shift in foreign reporting towards what we may call *networks* and *niches*. In a high-choice news environment, the trend away from general news and towards *niche audiences* is a key feature of several pioneering media models, including in foreign news. *Network journalism* increasingly reflects the mode of gathering and disseminating news.

A shift towards *niche audiences* reflects a fragmentation of the nature of the public sphere (Dahlgreen, 2005). A recent report on online searches for information on foreign affairs concluded that “Internet usage is driven by personal need and interest. Unlike broadcast and print, there is little discovery of content not directly relevant to the individual” (Fenyoe, 2010). Foreign news may increasingly need to be targeted and tailored to different audiences, according to social media scholar Charlie Beckett.

The previous model was that everybody should be interested in foreign affairs because it was kind of good for you. It was the broccoli version of news, a part of your diet as a human being. I think increasingly we're understanding that people have lots of different reasons for being interested. (...) People find ways to be interested in foreign reporting that do not necessarily fit into previous coverage of wars, elections or trade deals.²⁵

Likewise, a shift towards *networked reporting* represents the journalistic practices involved in engaging a fluid and overlapping audiences. Political scientist Markus Prior has described the high-choice media reality as a ‘post-broadcast democracy’ (Prior 2007). Communication is less characterised by the *one-to-many* format and increasingly by *many-to-many*. This is particularly challenging when talking about international news, but nevertheless seems to be one of the most promising areas of exploration when considering alternative models for foreign reporting. In the following we shall look at these two dimensions in turn.

²⁴ Interview with author

²⁵ Interview with author

4.1 Need for niches

Holes in the map of foreign news were appearing, As the number of staff foreign correspondents in Eastern Europe continued to decline, the news items from the region appearing in German-speaking media were too few, too superficial and too far in-between. That was the feeling among a group of freelance journalists based in Central and Eastern Europe. Starting from 2006 they formalized the Network for Reporting on Eastern Europe or “N-Ost” – from its humble beginnings as a mailing list – into an organization that aimed to connect freelancers in Eastern Europe with news media in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Today N-Ost has evolved into a combined media policy NGO and a syndication agency with 40-50 regularly contributing journalists in a dozen countries with 230 news media subscribing to the service. Subscribers pay for each news item that they reproduce.²⁶ The network is one example of a specialised news organisation that has emerged to supplement or replace the traditional model of the staff foreign correspondent. A key idea behind the network is pooling journalistic resources in order to provide specialised coverage for news outlets that cannot produce such coverage on their own. In a sense it is a shared and networked version of the foreign correspondent opening a range of new opportunities for foreign reporting, according to executive director of N-Ost, Hanno Gundert.

First of all we have to acknowledge the crisis in foreign reporting. (...) There is an undeniable shift from permanent correspondents to freelancers (...) Secondly we have to take a fresh view on funding because traditional resources are not sufficient anymore. (...) We have to think about public money, about foundations and about different models of cross-funding to provide this kind of quality coverage.

Still, N-Ost does not claim to have found an ideal model. Even if it has a stable groups of subscribers and targets one of the largest media markets in Europe, the journalistic business has not been sufficient to support that branch of the organisation fully. Instead, the organisation also relies on grants as well as semi- or non-journalistic activities. This includes foundation-supported NGO work and news monitoring for government, organisations and businesses.

N-Ost has, like many emerging niche media, experimented with a range of different models of cross-funding. The organisation is launching its own magazine to engage news consumers directly. Another, more contentious, possibility is using the network to carry out PR work for private companies. According to Hanno Gundert:

It is essential to have a crystal clear separation of journalistic and corporate publishing activities, and you need to be transparent about it (...) It would be turning a blind eye to realities of financing journalism if you reject it altogether.

While controversial for many journalists, the intertwining of PR and journalism is not uncommon in emerging news models. One very different example is the large Danish bank Jyske Bank that has financed its own online TV channel since 2008. The news operation of the bank draws on the expertise of its own analysts and several experienced television journalists covering the world of business and finance. For more than two years Jyske Bank TV employed

²⁶ <http://www.n-ost.org/medienpolitik>

a freelance foreign correspondent based in London to provide viewers with feature stories and interviews on world economy.

Jyske Bank TV represents another model of cross-funding within a niche of news production. The bank says that it sees its TV operation as an efficient way of reaching its customers and of branding the bank and its analysts at a relatively low cost.²⁷ In other words, the TV news production is subsidized with the expectation that it brings increased attention and branding value to the core banking business.

In that sense, the model is not so different from the one at play in large news and business intelligence operations such as Bloomberg or Thomson Reuters, both leading foreign news providers.

Bloomberg maintains a global news operation primarily providing market intelligence to corporate and financial clients via information terminals. While “news that move markets” remains the core business and revenue stream, the output also includes general interest news.²⁸ Providing news on politics, feature stories and cultural coverage – in some cases free of charge – makes use of existing bureaus around the world, raises public profile and brands the organisation (Freeland, 2010).

This niche model has several advantages over that of news media who exclusively target a general audience, especially during a cyclical crisis with advertising downturn. One such advantage is an existing, profitable information-gathering infrastructure that often rivals or surpasses that of general interest news outlets. One highly specialised business intelligence service such as Mergermarket claims to employ 300 journalists in 65 bureaus who specialise in covering mergers and acquisitions for subscribing business clients.²⁹ Selected reporting is published free of charge on a sub-site on the Financial Times websites.

To an extent this is nothing new. Foreign reporting was always, at least partly, a brand-building activity. But increasingly, specialised foreign news may be a key way of financing an expensive branch of journalism when the general news part of the equation is being weakened. Many “news organisations, maintaining a strength in international reporting, are doing so by leveraging their consumer brand to derive additional value from niche subscribers,” according to Richard Sambrook.

Understanding how low-value, high-reach consumer news and high-value, low-reach specialist news can support each other is clearly one route to sustainable global operations (Sambrook 2010: 21).

Newspapers like the Financial Times has tapped into niches with regionally focused projects like China Confidential and acquisitions like high-end analysis service Medley or Money Media. Such examples clearly point to the market value of specialised foreign reporting, at least in finance and business news.

It also raises the question as to whether the resources at traditional foreign desks are being used in an effective way. Media scholar Hans-Henrik Holm points to the large overlap in stories and the associated competitive waste, a problem partly counter-acted by the niche media model.

²⁷ <http://journalisten.dk/kurt-kan-brande>

²⁸ http://www.bloomberg.com/solutions/bloomberg_news/ and <http://sales.reuters.com/mediaguide/about/102>

²⁹ <http://www.mergermarket.com/info/what-we-do/>

The foreign desks are often repeating the same stories. They have not acted upon the idea of added value. (...) The danger is that the journalistic resources are not used smartly. They are used like 15 years ago.

Foreign desks may have to give up the idea of covering all areas of foreign news and instead focus their resources on what they do best, according to Hans-Henrik Holm. Pooling journalistic resources in specialised networks is one way of going in that direction. Another is cooperating with highly specialised NGOs. International aid and human rights organisations are increasingly communicating directly with supporters using journalistic genres and the advantage of having people on the ground in many places where news media do not. NGOs also provide information to journalists and work directly with news organisations creating a form of interdependence (Kalcsics 2012). Another example is the Danish organisation DanWatch which does investigative journalism in the field of corporate ethics in the developing world.³⁰ Danwatch, financed by public and private grants, NGOs and private contributions, cooperates with traditional media to get their investigations to a bigger audience.

The various outcomes of such a transition has important consequences for the kind of reporting that can be produced and to whom it will be available. Potentially it opens smarter ways of organising foreign newsgathering and makes it possible to cover a range of topics otherwise out of reach. On the other hand, a shift towards niche, specialised and partisan news outlets coupled with the crisis of general interest news media entails the risk of foreign reporting being dominated or hijacked by special interests, argues Chrystia Freeland (2010). This is the balance that smaller niche media like N-ost is trying to strike, says Hanno Gundert.

We try to find different models of cross-funding without reducing independence.

4.2 Co-creating networks

It was a new way of bringing foreign news to the front page. Shortly before presidential elections in 2011, Helsingin Sanomat, the largest newspaper in Finland, launched a series of stories on the international image of Finland in the wake of anti-EU and anti-immigration debates. Relying on a survey of 1,100 Finns living abroad, the newspaper published articles documenting a significant change in perceptions of the country as experiences by Finnish expats.

The story was the result of a conscious effort to engage the audience in the journalistic process. A few months earlier the newspaper had asked readers based abroad to sign up for a "Foreign Readers' Panel". Through the online setup the foreign desk could receive near-instant feedback from the initially 3,650 people who had agreed to contribute. The participants were even showcased with picture and a short bio on an interactive map of the world.

The panel turned out to be valuable not only for surveys, but also when covering natural disasters and other events in places where the newspaper had no correspondents. It provided a way to link foreign and domestic news in new ways, according to Jenni Virtanen, deputy foreign editor.

³⁰ <http://www.danwatch.dk/da/sider/danwatchs-formaal>

It was widening the perspective for us. (...) We understood that many people are living half their lives abroad. (...) Foreign reporting has a lot of other aspects than we thought.

Similarly, when the economic crisis hit the EU countries and ignited intense debate on the Euro-zone economies, Helsingin Sanomat was able to draw on input from 784 of readers who were all witnessing the economic situation from different parts of Europe.

It's a large group of people, and they have a lot of experience. And they are all observers of these overlapping issues. When we realised it, it was like wow.

While crowd-sourcing has a long history in general newsgathering, the method has been used less in foreign reporting. In the experience of Helsingin Sanomat it vastly improved traditional foreign reporting tools by gathering a different kind of information. Such input can be a way of adding an international angle to domestic debates. Crowd-sourcing international news can reflect the global-local connections in the audience itself.

This opening up of the journalistic process is a key aspect of different brands of collaborative journalism emerging in recent years, including "networked journalism" (Beckett 2008), "network journalism" (Heinrich, 2011) and open journalism³¹. In an environment of information abundance, international reporting is moving away from a closed operational structure and towards an "open and dynamic network structure" (Heinrich 2012: 5).

Extending the arms of a news organization by linking up with a greater number of these large and particularly these small information nodes, embedding the content gathered along these digital paths, is a first step in adapting to this sphere and it is a step towards providing a more "global outlook" in news coverage.³²

The use of live-blogging is one example of this. Online news sites routinely cover foreign news developments such as the civil war in Syria or US elections as-they-happen. The live-blog combining the demand for faster updates than is possible through news telegrams with the inclusion of user comments and, crucially, user-generated content from the scene of the news. A live-blog takes the form much as a social media timeline, but with an editorial filter that minimizes noise and, ideally, employs specialist knowledge to help users navigate the news stream.

The stream has indeed become a standard feature of news coverage. Networks like Al-Jazeera have made the time-line approach permanent on a sub-site called "The Stream".³³ CNN has launched iReport, a sub-site built mainly around user-generated content. Andy Carvin from US National Public Radio pointed to the powerful nature of crowdsourcing on networks like Twitter during the Arab Spring of 2010-11: "I'll often retweet stuff that isn't confirmed but ask followers to help me get more context. Volunteers have helped me find the exact location where videos have been recorded, translate them, recognize the accent, dialect, etc." (quoted in Heinrich, 2012).

³¹ Term coined by the Guardian newspaper. <http://gigaom.com/2012/03/01/guardian-says-open-journalism-is-the-only-way-forward/>

³² Heinrich 2012: 6

³³ stream.aljazeera.com

The collaborative approach to foreign reporting also includes other journalists and news organisations. Recent years have seen networks of reporters doing cross-border investigative journalism emerging. One is the Global Investigative Journalism Network, another is the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. Like the Helsingin Sanomat Readers Panel, such cooperation is by its very nature straddling the divide between domestic and foreign news. One example is the multi-year pan-European investigation into the EU agricultural subsidy programme. A collaborative effort by journalists in several countries, the project secured the publication of information on corporations, companies and individuals receiving public money making up more than one third of the EU budget. The investigation was made possible by the cross-border model, according Brigitte Alfter, who was among the initiators of the project.

Journalists have to be where the action is. In Europe we see how decisions are moving from the national to the EU level (...) Corporations and business are much more international, and so is organized crime. So the only way we can really be there is by joining forces with other colleagues. (...) We are not competitors, because the story that will be published in Denmark, Germany or France is really different. But we can build on the same research.³⁴

Brigitte Alfter has co-founded the European Fund for Investigative Journalism to encourage similar cross-border projects. She is also a freelance journalist working without the backing of a major news organisation. This is not unusual in the cross-border collaborative projects in which established news outlets and independent reporters are both participants.

It's a very mixed crowd with many different kinds of actors. Some are freelancers, some are big media, and some who have a deadline once a week and some every day. So you have to make them work together. (...) You can say that the entrepreneurial atmosphere is probably more widespread among freelancers.

At the same time, networked foreign reporting may alleviate some of the effects of the ad-hoc structure of foreign news, discussed in the last chapter. The multi-employer correspondent may well be a defining feature of foreign news coverage in the coming years. This will make pooling resourcing across borders and collaborating on research more pressing – not least in smaller media markets like the Scandinavian ones, according to media scholar Hans-Henrik Holm.

It shows that there is an organisational problem that needs to be solved. You cannot be a narrator of long feature stories and provide instant web news at the same time. So the challenge is finding a structure in which the [foreign-based] journalist does not work solo.

A more complex and collaborative journalistic process itself increases demand for transparency. The correspondent – as a guide not gatekeeper – must be open. Explain the process, the sources and provide the links. This argument is grounded in both trying to engage the audience and in using scarce resources more efficiently. This is a logic not

³⁴ Brigitte Alfter, interview with author

endorsed in the traditional “fortress journalism”, but it is a logic that seems increasingly inevitable if foreign reporting wants to engage a world online.

5. From crisis to collaboration

The current model of foreign news production is facing profound challenges. Traditional commercial foundations are being undermined. Changing patterns of news consumption are shifting audiences to new platforms demanding different practices, news formats and reporting skills.

This paper attempts to gauge how such pressures have influenced Danish foreign news desks and foreign correspondents. It maps the perception of these changes among foreign news professionals and tries to identify navigational points in the on-going transformation of foreign reporting.

Some of the findings of the survey are:

- Between 1998 and 2012 the number of staff foreign correspondents has declined by one third, from 60 to 39. In the three leading general interest newspapers, the number has dropped from 35 to 22 in the same period.
- Geographically, Europe has seen the biggest decline in permanent correspondents, while China is the only location with a significant increase between 1998 and 2012. Since 1998, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, South Asia and Eastern Europe have lost presence of staff correspondents.
- In 2012, newspapers still employ two-thirds of foreign-based correspondents, twice as many as the two public broadcasters.
- The nature of the foreign correspondent network is changing, shifting from fixed to a more flexible structure. With fewer permanent bureaus and fewer staff positions, foreign desks rely more on ad hoc bureaus and freelancers.
- Some correspondents have less attractive working conditions in terms of salary and travel budgets. There are indications of blurring of journalism and volunteer work, de-professionalization and stringers taking on non-journalistic work.

Some of these trends have direct implications for the reporting and reach of foreign desks in Denmark. On the basis of interviews with foreign news professionals this study argues that foreign news production is seen to be adapting along three dimensions: *structure* of foreign desks, *content* of foreign reporting and *role* of the foreign correspondent.

Foreign editors argue that the network of correspondents has had to become *flexible* and fluid in order to adapt to a rapidly shifting news hotspots. More emphasis is put on providing *added value* content to compete in a reality of information abundance. *Enriched* content is prioritised over ambitions to cover as broadly as possible. Also reflecting the high-choice environment of news, the foreign correspondent is thought to have lost the last remnants of classical role as *gatekeeper*. Instead he or she is expected to serve as a *guide* to news consumers. In order to do so, correspondents should be “global thinkers”, have an “enormous specialist knowledge and trustworthiness”, be brands for the news organisation and be “able to operate on all available media platforms”.

There are several inherent contradictions in these demands, reflecting the dilemmas faced by foreign desks. Requiring more output on more platforms while cutting back on staff contradicts the demand for *added-value* coverage. Requiring correspondents to be brands and

expert narrators is potentially at odds with a more fluid network of reporters consisting of freelancers and staff on less favourable terms.

This points to a lack of priority and strategy in broadcasting and newspaper management. Decisions affecting foreign desks seem to be reactions to external shocks rather than proactive strategic choices.

In the near term, strategic choice of newspapers - and the markets conditions facing them - will be of particular importance to the total foreign correspondent presence of Danish news media. While broadcasters DR and TV2 are required by regulations to provide foreign reporting and have relatively stable financing, newspapers are highly vulnerable to the weakening of current business models.

The advertising-subscription model for newspapers is facing a double pressure, with both ads and readership migrating to other platforms. In Denmark, the combined readership of the four newspapers with foreign correspondents was 1.9 million in May 2002. Ten years later the figure was 1.1 million.³⁵

Even if newspaper websites are growing simultaneously, this trend is eroding both the audience and economic foundations of foreign correspondents in newspapers.

Impact is declining because most output from correspondents is considered 'premium' content reserved for the declining number of print subscribers and the still relatively small number of e-paper subscribers. With some exceptions, original foreign coverage - especially reportage and long-form journalism - is not available on free-access websites. The risk is that the quality output of remaining correspondents is reaching an ever-smaller audience.

Economy is under pressure because growing web audience is currently not translating into revenue comparable to the traditional subscription-advertising model in print journalism. With current trends online platforms of newspapers are not able to support anything like the current network of foreign correspondents. The level of funding for foreign reporting in recent decades can by no means be taken for granted. Barring the introducing of successful new online business model or increased public funding, the number of foreign correspondents - especially those employed by newspapers - is likely to continue declining. This entails less journalistic output tailored for a Danish audience and less pluralism in foreign news. It could narrow the news spotlight, putting more emphasis on a few news centres with expanding white spots in the rest of the world. It would also impact broadcasters because newspaper correspondents, staff and freelance, are contributors to television and radio in places where broadcasters have no presence. Translated, syndicated and reworked material from foreign media outlets would likely form a growing part of the foreign news mix. At the same time, there are specifics to small language media markets - like the ones in the Nordic countries - that provide some possible niches for foreign reporting. Even in a global high-choice news environment, some news consumers will likely be willing to pay a premium for content tailored for local audiences. But such foreign news operations are likely to be less aimed at a broad audience and more likely to be niche oriented. This entails the risk of more polarised - and elite-oriented - consumption of foreign news.

This study argues that there is a broader need to rethink the way foreign reporting is organised to reflect these sweeping changes. We are only seeing the beginning of this shifting news ecology more generally, and we are only starting to understand the challenges and opportunities facing foreign reporting.

³⁵ Jyllands-Posten, Berlingske, Politiken and Information according to TNS Gallup (<http://www.gallup.dk/nyhedscenter/statistik/aktualitetstal.aspx>)

If the first Gulf War in 1991 marked the rise of the 'CNN-effect', we are now seeing the contours of a Youtube- or Twitter-effect in which "vast flows of information through digital social online networks are competing in scale and effectiveness with the mainstream media" (Beckett, 2012). Each news consumer can construct a metaphorical social media timeline encompassing personal networks, traditional news media, NGOs, governments, campaigners, celebrities and foreign correspondents, amateur or professional. Adapting to these shifts in news consumption require foreign news desks to incorporate new ways of engaging audiences.

This study suggests two dimensions along which models of foreign reporting could be conceptualised in a high-choice news environment: *networks* and *niches*. Networks relate to the drive towards more open practice in foreign reporting. Niches describe a trend adapting to fragmentation of the mass audience.

First, diminishing audiences for general interest news media do not necessarily equal less interest in foreign news. It does, however, limit the traditional cross-funding mechanisms of expensive foreign reporting in the traditional media business model. The drive towards niche audiences is a consequence of audience fragmentation.

A case study of German foreign news network N-Ost, suggests a pure foreign-reporting based organisation is hard to sustain even with a large audience. However, some non-traditional funding and cross-funding can be found within journalism financed by grants and by cooperating with NGOs. These models entail a risk of journalism being 'hijacked' by special interests. The case study also suggests that a mix of journalism and PR work may be emerging in some branches of foreign reporting with all ethical and professional dilemmas that entails. The most commercially successful foreign reporting niche models, on the other hand, are found within business and finance. Understanding how and if general interest foreign news and high-value specialist news can support each other is a key challenge to foreign reporting entrepreneurs.

Another important way of interacting with fluid audiences is within the sphere of networked journalism. In what has been called a "post-broadcast" society foreign news professionals interact with news consumers and collaborate with them. The experience of Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat exemplifies this adaptation towards this concept of foreign reporting. Through a Foreign Readers Panel the newspaper has gathered input from the audiences for research and in breaking news situations. In some cases this has connected foreign and domestic news reflecting global-local connections in the audience itself.

This mode of foreign reporting can potentially engage a changing audience and make foreign news relevant to news consumers. In that sense, the foreign correspondent should become *less foreign* to crowds and colleagues alike. Online news consumers co-create news and expect to be able to opt into the process of news production, validation and dissemination. Opening up foreign reporting to crowds and cooperation may be a way of not only using resources more efficiently but also sustain and improve the reach and quality of foreign reporting. Within foreign news desks, that requires not just reacting to external shocks but taking strategic decisions.

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APPENDIX I

Location of staff correspondents employed by Danish news media

	1998	2012
Beijing		4
Beirut		4
Berlin	8	3
Brussels	15	8
Cape Town	1	
London	3	4
Madrid		1
Moscow	7	
New Delhi	1	
New York		1
Oslo	1	
Paris	2	2
Prague	1	
Rio de Janiero	1	
Rome	2	1
San Francisco		1
Singapore	1	
Stockholm	2	
Tel Aviv/ Jerusalem	5	2
Tokyo	1	
Washington	9	6
Savannah		1
Santa Fe		1
	60	39

For details on the survey please see Chapter 2.3
Data from 1998: Holm et al 2000.

APPENDIX II

List of interviewees

Journalists and editors

Thomas Falbe, foreign editor, DR

Jakob Vissing, foreign editor, TV2

Kristian Mouritzen, foreign editor, Berlingske

Flemming Rose, foreign editor, Jyllands-Posten

Michael Jarlner, foreign editor, Politiken

Henrik Kaufholz, Politiken

Matilde Kimer, DR

Claus Reinholdt, TV2

Michael Kuttner, Jyllands-Posten

Kristian Pedersen, Berlingske

Martin Selsøe, Freelance

Lone Theils, Freelance

Charlotte Sylvestersen, Freelance

Case studies

Jenni Virtanen, Helsingin Sanomat

Brigitte Alfter, European Fund for Investigative Journalism

Hanno Gundert, n-ost

Scholars

Hans-Henrik Holm, Danish School of Journalism

Charlie Beckett, London School of Economics