

The Emergence of Metropolitan News

Shifting Concepts of Localism in Norwegian Regional Newspapers

Helle Sjøvaag

Abstract

This article presents a quantitative and comparative content analysis of four Norwegian regional newspapers owned by the Schibsted Media Group. The aim of the analysis is to establish levels of localism in the online and printed editions of the newspapers and to discuss the relation between the local, regional, metropolitan and national news levels on two publishing platforms. Results show that the local profile is increasingly becoming the defining feature of these regional newspapers, even more so online than in print. As the analysis shows an increase in the amount of everyday life-related stories in the local news content, this study finds that Norwegian regional newspapers are moving towards a more metropolitan profile.

Keywords: localism, metropolitan news, regional newspapers, online news, quantitative content analysis

Introduction

The newspaper publishing industry in Norway is regulated according to principles of localism and diversity and bound to regional sectors of community and audience reach. Principles informing the regulation of media ownership are based on normative ideals of pluralism and diversity to secure democracy, freedom of speech and a vibrant public sphere (Stortingsmelding 57, 2000-2001). This regulatory association between pluralism and geographic location assumes that place and representation are fundamental principles for democratic participation. In the Norwegian context, a central aim of ownership regulation is therefore to secure the presence of news media to sustain local democratic structures. However, while media diversity is premised on the presence of local journalistic institutions, regionalism is primarily associated with restrictions on ownership reach – regulation that is mobilized to avoid monopolization in concentrated markets. While there is an assumption in legislation that localism in news production is important for democratic participation, regionalism seems to be disassociated with content. Regionalism is operationalized in legislation according to established county boundaries, but is otherwise not discussed, defined or conceptualized. This lack of context concerning what exactly regionalism entails in news production is evident in the research on local news content (cf. Richards 2012), as well as in the research on the structural and organizational aspects of regional newspaper publishing.

Regionalism in the newspaper industry denotes dispersed centres of journalistic production that are assumed – because of their peripheral location in relation to the centre – to have positive effects on the diversity of the national media system as a whole. As such, regional newspapers also serve a structural role. Because of this position, regional news titles are particularly vulnerable in a market context, as they face competition both from national and local papers. The inherent value of regional newspapers within this centre-periphery dimension could help to explain why much of the research has refrained from discussing the differences between local, regional, metropolitan and national as categories of news. There are numerous content analyses of regional newspapers, but these studies seldom discuss what is regional about these publications, how they operationalize their regional identity and what it means to be a regional newspaper in terms of content. Hence there is a gap in the research on regional newspapers regarding the difference between regional news, local news and national news, how this difference is reflected in regional news output and the significance of this difference for the local areas serviced within such regions.

The present article analyses the geographical dimensions of news content to establish the levels of local, regional and national news in the regional newspaper markets in southern Norway, specifically looking at the Schibsted regional press. What emerges from the analysis is not only that regional newspapers are moving their content towards a more metropolitan profile – it also displays the gap that exists in conceptualizing operationalizations of geographical dimensions in the content analytic coding of news. The evident metropolitan profile of the newspapers analysed in the study therefore points to a lack of attention in the research as to the distinction and relationship between local, metropolitan and regional news content.

National Context

The Norwegian newspaper system has been described using the umbrella model. Publications in local markets compete within the same geographic area, while also facing competition from regional or metropolitan newspapers published in the larger cities, and national dailies distributed across the country (Krumsvik 2011; Rosse 1975). Due to the national geography, population dispersal and decentralized political system, Norwegian local communities have historically enjoyed high newspaper penetration (Hatcher & Haavik 2013). According to an overview by Sigurd Høst (2014), the national market (in 2013) consists of 229 newspapers of which 19 have national distribution, seven are metropolitan papers, and 203 are local titles of varying publication frequency. Among the seven metropolitan papers, four can be considered regional publications (*Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Adresseavisen* and *Stavanger Aftenblad*), while one of Høst's leading local dailies (*Fædrelandsvennen*) is considered regional by other overviews (Vaage 2013). Looking at the relative distribution of titles across the national, regional, metropolitan and local level, the market is narrower in the regional strand than in the local and national strand – displaying the competitive market situation in which regional titles operate. The umbrella market situation in which the Schibsted regional press finds itself thus serves as an appropriate context in which to study the relationship between local, metropolitan, regional and national news.

Limitations

The article presents a comparative and quantitative content analysis of the print and on-line local, regional, national and foreign news of Schibsted's four regional newspapers, *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* and *Fædrelandsvennen*, from 2012 to 2013. While the study includes two data points, its longitudinal value is somewhat limited, as the data were collected only seven months apart. This has restricted value in terms of determining longitudinal trends, however the interval was chosen deliberately to look for impacts of company consolidation during the period. In the fall of 2012, Schibsted introduced a number of measures aimed at securing the company's financial position – among them centralization of core services and consolidation of content production. The company has also been pursuing digital-first publication, hired more “digital heads” and gathered large amounts of data on digital subscribers. While seven months is short in terms of observable changes in news cultures, online news develops fast, and the period is therefore sufficient to look for immediate impacts resulting from consolidation.

Furthermore, there are differences between the four newspapers that complicate the level at which substantial comparisons can be made. Although the papers are similar in nature – they are all published in medium to large cities serving regional communities, share an editorial identity and have a common history as number-one papers in their markets, with common ownership facilitating a shared corporate identity – there are also differences between them, the primary one being the aspect of geographical reach.

For one thing, *Aftenposten* has a national distribution (and is the largest print paper in the country with a circulation of 214,026 (Opplag.no)) that sets it apart from the other three newspapers. *Aftenposten* does not merely serve the capital and its surrounding regions; it also has a largely national agenda and competes with other national media such as the daily tabloids and the public service broadcasters. Along with *Bergens Tidende* and *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Aftenposten* is described (Høst 2014) as a metropolitan newspaper, while *Fædrelandsvennen* – the smallest publication in this sample – is listed as a leading local daily. These differences are nevertheless interesting with regard to what exactly constitutes local, regional and metropolitan in relation to content, focus and reach. The following section will therefore engage in a discussion of the various geographical categories into which we divide newspaper content.

Local, Metropolitan, or Regional?

Peter Dunnett (1988) segregates media markets into different axes of competition. On the geographical axis, newspapers can either be international, national, regional, metropolitan or local in reach. Looking at the umbrella model of newspaper publishing (Rosse 1975), translated to the Norwegian situation (NOU 2000), this is divided into national newspapers, metropolitan or regional newspapers, local dailies and local weeklies – newspapers that publish between one and four editions per week (see Bjørtuft 2005). In the context of such taxonomies, there seems to be no distinction between the regional and the metropolitan level applied to the Norwegian context. Internationally, the concept of metropolitan newspaper publication is well established (cf. Anderson). Although few authors elaborate on what actually renders a metropolitan characterization applicable to a newspaper, the indication is that the newspaper has a decidedly city-proximate focus.

The question is whether such a characterization may apply to the Schibsted regional press and its position in the Norwegian newspaper landscape, or whether these four newspapers can better be described as regional. The natural question ensuing from this distinction is whether it matters. Overall, local, regional, metropolitan and national are terms that refer to distribution reach, while local (and to some extent metropolitan) is also used to describe content, whereas regional is not. Within these constructed levels, local and *localism* therefore carry decidedly positive connotations.

Localism

The positive ring carried by the concept of localism in news production is particularly tied to aspects of community, participation, identity and ownership. Studies have shown that local journalists often have strong historical bonds with the community in which they work (Hanusch 2014; Hatcher & Haavik 2013; Plaut 2014). Studies have also consistently found that there is a connection between local newspapers, readership and civic engagement, both in the U.S. (Moy et al. 2004; Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2006; Paek et al. 2005) and in Norway (Bruns & Himmler 2011; Hatcher & Haavik 2013; Skogerbø & Winsvold 2011). The same can be said of the link between local journalism, local identity (Kanniss 1991; McNair 2006), and local connectivity (Richards 2012). Local news operations are also linked with the general health of the democratic system (cf. Bruns & Himmler 2011:490; Ekström et al. 2006). The regulatory principle of ownership plurality and local market competition supports this notion of democratic accountability. Moreover, the historical legitimacy of local newspaper publishing is based on the accountability that comes from decentralized local ownership. Locally owned newspapers are accountable to their communities, not to political parties or the government (Pauly & Eckert 2002: 310; Roppen 2003: 314). The value of local publication therefore lies in the proximity that places journalists close to the events they are covering, close to the events of the community and close to the people that live in the community (Braman 2007: 253).

Regionalism

The concept of regionalism does not mobilize the same sort of democratic rationalizations, and indeed, remains largely unexplored in the research literature when it comes to news content (cf. Richards 2012). Regionalism is rather tied to national levels of diversity, centre-periphery dimensions of national politics, to organizational aspects of news production, and to distribution reach. In many contexts, regionalism is also tied to ruralism (cf. Hanusch 2014; Richards 2012). Regionalism has been seen as a safeguard against some of the perils of local affiliation (cf. Hjeltnes 2010: 430; Kanniss 1991; Parsons et al. 1988: 98-101). Norwegian media regulations (NOU 1988: 36) expressed concern early on as to the effect on editorial independence of close ties between industrial and media powers in local markets. As such, financial independence due to corporate ownership can serve to ensure critical journalism – a position that strengthens the potential democratic impact and community standing of a publication (cf. Hjeltnes 2010: 450; Roppen 2003: 18-19). As corporate ownership should entail greater integration of resources, chain ownership can also better facilitate innovation (cf. Nel 2010). While the shift in autonomy towards a corporative centralized decision-making system can

decrease local affiliation and cause newspapers within the same corporation to become increasingly similar, homogenization tendencies in newspaper chains are also limited by the fact that many of the newspapers need a distinct local focus in their daily news coverage (Østbye & Kvalheim 2009), primarily because both advertising and audience markets are local (Busterna 1988: 43; Pauly & Eckert 2002: 311).

Metropolitanism

It is this need for a distinct local focus that makes regional newspapers increasingly metropolitan in their editorial orientation. As Goyette-Côté and colleagues (2012) point out, regional news “can only be covered by organizations that have important structures based in a given area” (p. 756). The fact that the Schibsted regional titles have closed down more and more of their regional offices during recent years naturally limits the infrastructure with which to cover the regions. Metropolitan newspapers are neither protected nor encouraged by legislation, but seem to develop naturally as part of the general urbanization of society (cf. Conboy 2004). The centralization of commerce and industry, residential patterns, cultural institutions and publically funded infrastructure all help to ensure that more of our activity is drawn towards an urban centre that collects the common social, cultural and political resources that citizens rely upon in their daily lives (cf. Barnhurst & Nerone 2001; Lacy 1984). Following the concerns of their citizens, newspapers located in larger cities naturally become more inclined to cover urban matters relevant to the metropolitan lifestyle. Hence, metropolitan newspapers are largely conceptualized as city newspapers (cf. Anderson 2013; Ewart 2014; Force 1962; Hanusch 2014). Metropolitan newspapers can therefore be said to be ‘local’ in orientation. And while metropolitan newspapers can be seen to provide regional coverage (Rosse 1975), regionalism has also been defined outside the scope of the metropolitan reach (Richards 2012).

Which Is It?

The predominant attention that research pays to the concept of localism, and the positive association that localism holds, has to do with central concepts in the political economy of news production – accountability within the community, facilitation of political participation, editorial independence from ownership and commercial interests, and plurality in the media market (Braman 2007: 232; Busterna 1988: 51; Noam 2009: 17; Picard 2004: 60). Regionalism, on the other hand, is tied primarily to ownership and subscription or distribution reach. In a regulatory context, therefore, it seems strange that regionalism is not also associated with content. Regional newspapers intend to cover a whole region, not just a metropolitan community. What, then, is local and what is regional about the content of Schibsted’s regional newspapers? Are the newspapers better described as metropolitan? How does this content relate to national news?

On the surface, the distinction between regional, metropolitan and local journalism seems fairly straightforward. An attempt to define these categories could designate metropolitan journalism as the coverage of large cities, local journalism as the coverage of smaller towns and villages, while regional journalism is rural journalism. But the distinction between these three journalistic levels can differ from context to context, and largely depends on the wider national landscape in which the newspapers are situ-

ated. The different levels of news publishing that Rosse (1975) refers to in his umbrella model may cater to the American situation (in the 1970s), where suburbs (and suburban newspapers) were a standard feature reflecting the country's geographical population distribution; but this is not necessarily applicable to other national contexts (such as the Australian, cf. Hanusch 2014). Metropolitan, however, seems to inspire some consensus. Metropolitan journalism is city journalism.

In the context of the present study, city-focused journalism has been coded as local news, while news from outside the metropolitan area has been considered regional. Regional affiliation has been coded according to general subscription and distribution reach, i.e. to what extent the newspapers seek sales in more than one county. News from beyond the regions is considered national news, and stories taking place outside Norway are considered foreign news. Localism here refers to 'close to the editorial office', or 'within the city limits'. In a *post hoc* analysis, therefore, it makes more sense to describe this local news focus as metropolitan, particularly because the nature of the content is decidedly urban in orientation.

Data and Methodology

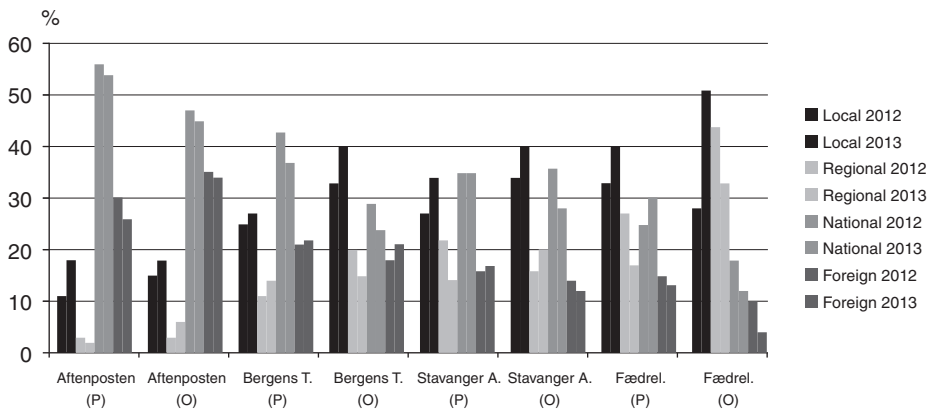
The quantitative content analysis compares two weeks of continuous coverage in 2012 (23-29 June) and 2013 (25-31 January), both printed and online editions (n=7419), of four of the largest regional newspapers in Norway¹. As points of extraction, the two periods are relatively comparable. They both exclude regular holidays, share impacts of seasonal weather, have similarly saturated sports agendas, and are equally characterized by seasonal recreational activities. Differences are primarily related to the parliamentary calendar, as Parliament is not in session during the last weeks of June, while it is in January, although this factor is of minor importance as this only pertains to legislation processes. As the June data were collected immediately following the announcement of Schibsted's consolidations plans, these differences are of minor importance in terms of determining changes in the local, metropolitan and regional profiles of these papers.

The four titles included in the study are owned by the Schibsted Media Group² and are published in different regions of the country. *Aftenposten* is the largest circulation national daily published in the capital, Oslo; *Bergens Tidende* is the largest daily published outside the capital in Norway's second largest west-coast city, Bergen; *Stavanger Aftenblad* in the southwest city, Stavanger, and *Fædrelandsvennen* in the southern city, Kristiansand³. The unit of analysis is the article as printed in the newspaper and the front-page story published in the online edition. The data were collected from the print editions or their iPad versions (identical to the printed copy) (n=4075⁴), as well as downloaded screen shots⁵ of the front pages⁶ of the online editions (n=3344⁷), on average once every hour between 08:00 and 24:00. Units were analysed using the SPSS statistical programme based on a coding scheme of over 60 variables designed to register stories according to localism and topical content⁸. The analysis distinguishes between news pertaining to the city of publication (local), the surrounding areas (regional), within national borders (national) and outside national borders (foreign). The data facilitate a comparative quantitative content analysis measuring the content profiles of the printed and online editions as well as the local, metropolitan and regional affiliation of the content⁹.

Findings

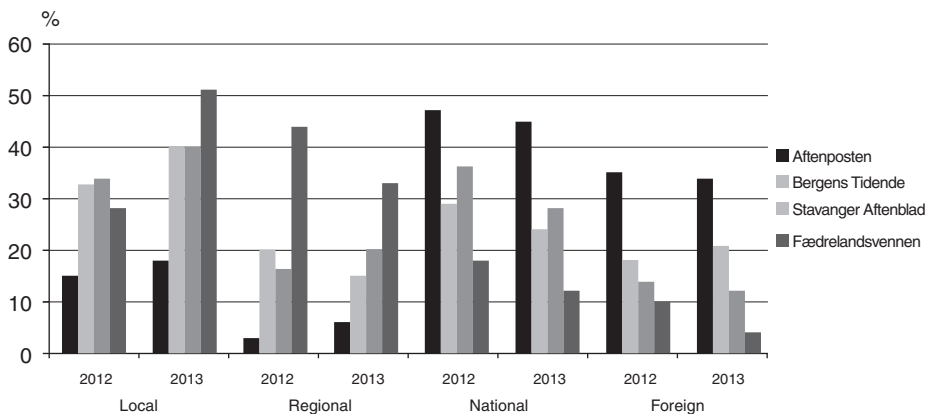
Findings show that the level of local news pertaining to the city of publication (i.e., metropolitan news) is on the rise – in some cases significantly so – and that this increase is larger online than it is in print (see Table 1, Appendix). The analysis subsequently displays a drop in the level of regional news. National news also sees a general decline for some of the titles, while the level of foreign news is more or less stable. The analysis also shows a rise in the amount of news items concerning the everyday life concerns of citizens – issues such as leisure, hobby and fitness; stories about traffic, weather and communal infrastructure; softer news in the areas of lifestyle and consumer issues; as well as family matters, child rearing and religious issues. Local news coverage sees a particular increase in these topical areas – online primarily in traffic updates and infrastructure stories about the construction of roads, parks and recreational facilities. The increase in news from the city therefore corresponds with a decrease in stories from the regions surrounding the metropolitan area.

Figure 1. Illustration of Findings Combined

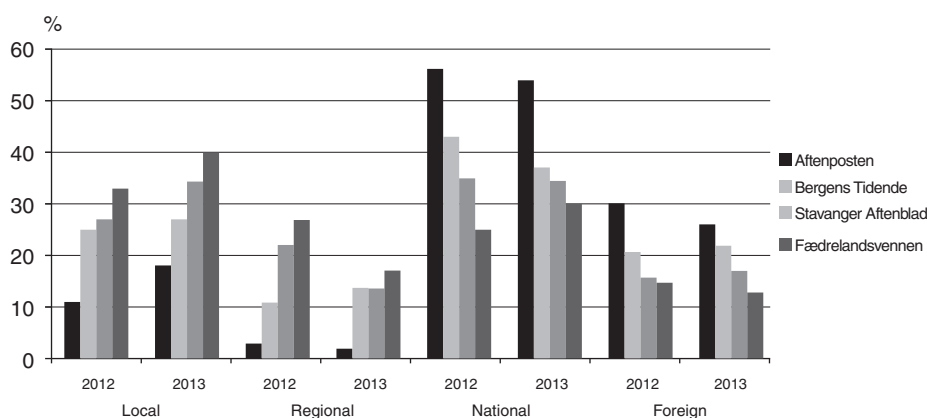


Note: Local, regional, national and foreign coverage, print (P) and online (O), in Aftenposten, Bergens Tidende, Stavanger Aftenblad and Fædrelandsvennen 2012-2013.
n= see footnotes 4 and 7.

Figure 2. Online



Note: Local, regional, national and foreign news online at Aftenposten, Bergens Tidende, Stavanger Aftenblad and Fædrelandsvennen 2012-2013.
n= see footnote 7.

Figure 3. Print

Note: Local, regional, national and foreign news in the printed versions of *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* and *Fædrelandsvennen* 2012-2013.
n= see footnote 4.

Aftenposten

As might be expected, the nationally distributed *Aftenposten* has the lowest level of local news among the four titles, at 18 per cent for the print and online editions in 2013 (Figure 2 and Figure 3). It has a decidedly national and international news agenda, with the largest amount of national news of all the four newspapers (Figure 1), with more than half the content in print and close to half of online news being national in orientation. Its foreign news profile is also augmented online relative to the printed version, at the expense of national and local coverage, something that contributes to move the paper towards the top-end of the national market. *Aftenposten* has relatively low levels of local news reports from the city of Oslo. That is, the metropolitan focus of the newspaper is limited, indicating that the title aims to set the national news agenda rather than serve primarily as a newspaper for the residents of the capital. There is, however, an increase in the city-proximate focus of the print version from 2012 to 2013 (from 11 per cent to 18 per cent) (Figure 3), and there has been a significant increase in the metropolitan ‘everyday life’ content of both editions. *Aftenposten*’s local stories predominantly concern traffic conditions, infrastructure issues and construction going on in Oslo, leisure and hobby, fitness and recreation features relevant to city dwellers. This slight increase in local news and the focus of the content could perhaps be explained by the fact that *Aftenposten*’s local edition *Aften* was discontinued in 2013 (Høst 2014), and that some of this local journalism may have been continued in the national edition.

However, *Aftenposten* carries very little news of regional relevance – less than six per cent – neither online nor in print. Regional news primarily concerns occurrences related to traffic issues, crime and accidents taking place in the regions surrounding the capital. Regular subscribers to *Aftenposten* living outside the capital will not find many issues relevant to their municipalities covered by this nationally distributed newspaper, but will be thoroughly updated on the national news agenda. Its national news coverage shows a fairly even distribution across content categories, reflecting the paper’s omnibus identity. However, the paper carries comparatively little crime and accident stories in

its national news, while political stories, economy, cultural issues and sports coverage predominates. As for foreign news, this primarily consists of political stories and sports, with foreign news featuring over 30 per cent in both editions of the paper for both years analyzed. *Aftenposten* supports a limited staff of foreign correspondents that the other Schibsted papers do not, and subsequently seeks to capitalize as much as possible on this investment, something that is reflected in its focus on foreign news.

Bergens Tidende

The largest of these newspapers published outside the capital, *Bergens Tidende*, has a predominantly national print profile, with a high degree of local content and a fair amount of foreign news, slightly above 20 per cent (Figure 3). However, in the online edition, local coverage increases significantly, primarily at the expense of national coverage (Figure 2). *Bergens Tidende* shows an increase in news from the Bergen area from 2012 to 2013, both in print and online, primarily within arts and culture. The increase is most substantial online, from 33 per cent to 40 per cent, predominantly stories concerning everyday life issues such as health and fitness, traffic, weather, and consumer issues, and there is also some gain in local crime coverage online. Regional news is less present than local news in both editions of the paper, and while there is an increase in regional coverage in the print edition from 11 per cent in 2012 to 14 per cent 2013, the online regional coverage drops from 20 per cent to 15 per cent in the same period. On print this increase in regional news mostly consists of traffic and construction, lifestyle and consumer issues. Online, regional coverage primarily concerns accidents. From 2012 to 2013, *Bergens Tidende* can therefore be seen to have embraced a more metropolitan profile, particularly online, with a greater focus on events happening in its city of publication.

The increase in metropolitan focus in *Bergens Tidende* primarily comes at the expense of national news coverage. Its national news agenda bears the same traits as *Aftenposten's*, considering that they both have omnibus newspaper profiles. However, national news in *Bergens Tidende* predominantly concerns sports news, with an additional focus on everyday life issues such as lifestyle, travel and leisure in the online edition. The national news agenda in *Bergens Tidende* could be seen to reflect the distribution of resources within regional newsrooms. As syndicated sports and lifestyle stories are increasingly produced by centralized production hubs catered to by the parent company, these topics are less resource-demanding for the organization. A predominance of foreign sports coverage is equally indicative of cheap production – however there is also a fair amount of politics from the international scene, both in print and online.

Stavanger Aftenblad

Like *Bergens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* aims to cover the regions surrounding its city of publication, and carries specific sections devoted to these geographical areas in its print edition. *Stavanger Aftenblad* has a significant national content profile that could be attributed to its heavy focus on the oil sector located in the city and surrounding areas – addressing news topics that are largely national in relevance and orientation, such as labour issues, economic issues and energy-sector-related policies. Nevertheless, *Stavanger Aftenblad* experiences a significant increase in local print news from 2012 to

2013, and a subsequent drop in printed regional news (Figure 3). Local print news grows in the areas of politics and everyday life (such as traffic and construction), social issues (such as work, health and immigration issues) and local culture. In the online edition, there is a substantial rise in everyday life stories and a significant drop in local crime. Regionally, there is a decline in all content categories in the print edition, except sports and accidents, where there is an increase. Online, regional politics and crime stories see a drop in focus, while there is an increase in traffic and accidents from the regions. So while the newspaper can be seen to strengthen its metropolitan profile by increasing its focus on local politics, leisure and culture; coverage of the regions is largely limited to infrastructure issues and sports stories. Like *Bergens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* also has an excess of political news and sports stories in its foreign coverage.

Fædrelandsvennen

The relative balance that exists between local, regional and national news found in *Fædrelandsvennen*'s printed edition is shifted heavily towards local and regional matters in its online edition (Figure 2 and 3). The smallest newspaper in the sample, *Fædrelandsvennen* also has the most regional news of all the four titles – a somewhat surprising finding, seeing as *Fædrelandsvennen* is considered a leading local daily by some market overviews (e.g., Høst 2014). However, *Fædrelandsvennen* also shows an overall increase in local print news from 2012 to 2013, at the expense of national news, and a significant drop in printed regional news (Figure 3). There is a large online increase in stories from the city of Kristiansand, from 28 per cent to 51 per cent, and a corresponding drop in the other categories (Figure 2). Local print news growth is largely accounted for by political stories and everyday life stories, while there is a drop in news from the cultural sector. Online, local news shows a significant increase in sports stories, everyday life and culture. Regional news in the print edition displays a substantial drop in culture and crime coverage, while online, regional news growth largely consists of accidents. *Fædrelandsvennen* is the only one of the four titles to have erected a paywall at the time of sampling, which could help to explain the steep increase in the paper's online metropolitan focus. In print, *Fædrelandsvennen*'s national news coverage leans towards sports, while there is also some attention to the national cultural scene and the economic sector. Online, national coverage primarily consists of everyday life stories about lifestyle, leisure and consumer issues. *Fædrelandsvennen* is hence less preoccupied with the national political agenda than the other three newspapers, something that might be explained by its predominant local identity. As for foreign coverage, the little there is consists, as in the other titles, of sports and politics.

Metropolitanism and Everyday Life

When looking at the type of content that makes up the metropolitan or city-oriented coverage of these four newspapers, we not only find reflections of newspaper profiles as they are already established in the market, but also evidence of the diverging platform identities that position print and online as complementarities in the news market (Figure 1). The rising local content profiles that make the newspapers more metropolitan in orientation primarily address issues that are directly relevant to people's everyday lives

– issues such as leisure, hobby and fitness, travel and consumer issues that entertain and guide people. The online news sites advise readers on what wines go with what meal, suggest today’s dinner and update commuters on the traffic and construction going on in the city. This ‘everyday life’ focus is common in print and online alike. The local content profile is most noticeably augmented online in the areas of crime, accidents, and sports; and most noticeably decreases online in the areas of social issues and politics – features evident of the online media’s tendency towards immediacy, entertainment and disruptions.

Regional stories found in the printed editions concern primarily traffic issues, construction, building and planning in the regional area, and weather stories. The regional topical focus is reflected in the online editions, but regional online coverage is also significantly enhanced by attention to accidents – primarily in the form of traffic collisions, fires and rockslides. The difference in regional focus between the printed and online platform consists almost exclusively of this category. The four cities where these newspapers are published are accessible via motorways connecting the increasingly population-dense regional centres in Southern Norway. These roads are not only accident prone, but the daily toil of suburban-to-city commuting along a strained communication grid makes traffic a natural part of everyday life, and hence a relevant news topic. Norwegian topography and weather also ensure that a steady stream of news on car accidents, floods, avalanches, storms and generally hazardous conditions reaches city dwellers. Hence, local coverage serves a general orientation function, updating people on what goes on in the city that may serve as entertainment (sports and culture), information (politics, traffic, construction and weather) and guidance (food, fitness and leisure). As such, the predominant everyday life focus of the local coverage – particularly online – is heavily linked to metropolitanism and a metropolitan or ‘urban’ way of life. As the advertising markets supporting these regional titles are bound to the city rather than the regions – where ‘rural’ advertisers prefer local newspapers – this shift in content favouring the leisure industries is also a reflection of the financial situation in the newspaper sector.

Regional coverage, on the other hand, can be seen to support a more rural narrative. The regional content primarily serves to warn people of the dangerous conditions that exist outside the city limits, update readers on how the closest rivalling sports teams are doing, and occasionally informs people about the tranquillity of life beyond metropolitan borders, the quirkiness of rural life and the many opportunities for leisure that can be found in the mountains, beaches, forests and shorelines that lie just outside the cities. This increased metropolitan focus of the Schibsted regional press therefore points towards a growing centre-periphery diversion within the regions themselves that could have political ramifications. On a national level, the principle of ownership diversity within the regional press structure is supported by legislation because it serves a balancing, diversifying and representational function within a historically strong centre-periphery political divide. The fact that regional news organizations are moving towards a corresponding division based on proximity to the centres of local political, cultural and commercial power suggests that the Schibsted regional press might be overlooking its social responsibility within the national news structure.

Expanding regional media houses could therefore affect levels of pluralism in the media market, and contribute to diminishing levels of competition within regions

(Björkroth & Grönlund 2014). On the other hand, the increased metropolitan focus that these publications display also contributes to decrease the risk of homogenization within the newspaper chain (Østbye & Kvalheim 2009). This development reflects the competitive position encountered by the regional press in general. Faced with falling circulation figures, focusing on core audiences, core markets and their metropolitan surroundings amounts to minimizing risk. As national coverage becomes more inclined towards sports, politics and leisure, non-local content moves towards an information and entertainment function, while local, metropolitan and regional news rather reflect different aspects of association. As localism in newspaper publishing is associated with community building and identity, resources are clearly diverted to content areas most relevant to daily readers, while more peripheral content can be seen to serve a more traditional news function.

The current crisis affecting newspapers around the world is also influencing operations in the Schibsted regional press, and the newspapers analysed here have all experienced substantial cuts in editorial staff during recent years. The loss of capital-based correspondents and regional offices, tighter editorial resources and a strategic effort to shift to digital business models means journalists working for these regional titles experience increasing time constraints in their daily work. The pressures of the continuous deadline therefore serve to narrow the radius of journalistic operations, moving news coverage closer and closer to the editorial offices. Schibsted has engaged heavily in a strategy to retain audiences over the past years, with all titles erecting paywalls during 2013, *Fædrelandsvennen* being the first (in 2012). Making the online platform increasingly relevant to the local community may not only serve to remind readers of the local commitment of their regional newspaper, it may also demonstrate the usefulness of having a newspaper subscription once the paywall goes up. In building towards digital subscription, then, these regional titles have clearly demonstrated their commitment to the people residing in their city of publication, with its increased metropolitan news focus.

Conclusions

Overall, this content analysis of the Schibsted regional newspapers shows that local or city-oriented content has increased compared to the situation prior to Schibsted's introduction of cost-cutting measures in the fall of 2012. For the three regionally distributed newspapers, *Bergens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* and *Fædrelandsvennen*, local content has increased, primarily at the expense of regional and national content. Furthermore, local news is becoming more adapted to lifestyle, consumer and everyday life issues, while regional coverage is more concerned with sports, traffic and accidents, and national news predominantly with sports, politics, lifestyle and consumer issues. As local content refers to news happening within the city limits, the newspapers are clearly becoming more metropolitan in orientation – also regarding the topics covered, which are more 'urban' in nature. Hence, while associated geographically, regionalism in newspaper publishing does not necessarily denote regional coverage or reach. Rather, metropolitan centres seem to have become increasingly central to the news focus of the regional press. The results of the present analysis should therefore remind regulatory bodies to not only focus on limiting ownership concentration at a national or regional

level. They should be equally concerned with the purpose that super-local publications and number-two newspapers serve for local democratic accountability.

While the semantics of regionalism, metropolitanism and localism may not matter much for the practical purposes of the content of the regional press, these geographical tags nevertheless have regulatory implications. Established press support systems directly correlate local news content with sustaining local democratic structures, while restrictions on regional ownership make no association between regional coverage and regional reach. The terms local and metropolitan carry with them certain expectations concerning the content of news, while regional – as a concept in newspaper publishing – is primarily an administrative term. What this implies is that the operationalization of analysing newspaper content is premised first and foremost on the positive values embedded in that which is local, and on regional being defined as that which lies outside the centre. Hindsight also shows that local, defined as ‘within city limits’ in the present analysis, for all practical purposes has been operationalized as ‘metropolitan’. This de facto operationalization of local as metropolitan complicates the distinction between geographical categories, but also illuminates the lack of specificity with which the terms are normally used, and the lack of clarity in their definition. What we can assume from this methodological finding is that terms such as local, metropolitan and regional carry with them certain naturalized assumptions – assumptions that need to be further challenged in research on news content.

While the scope of this investigation has only looked for the immediate effects of consolidation within the newspaper chain, there is also merit in applying a time-focused perspective. The web is a rapidly changing environment, reliant on media businesses assuming an increasingly innovation-driven approach to news publishing. The limited longitudinal scope offered in the present study can therefore contribute to highlighting the extent to which the newspaper industry today is characterized by disruption. That being said, continued monitoring of the development of the metropolitan trend found in this study will also be necessary in future research, not least because news production within these traditional media houses is under continued financial strain.

Notes

1. Sundays excluded to account for the publication frequency of the two smallest newspapers.
2. Schibsted (est. 1839) is Norway’s largest media company. Its newspaper subsidiary Schibsted Norge (a division established in June 2009 as Media Norge) comprises Schibsted’s four regional newspapers in the Norwegian market, the online classifieds service Finn.no, the national tabloid VG, the publishing house Schibsted Forlag and the printing operation NMO Trykk.
3. Circulation figures 2013: Aftenposten 214 026; Bergens Tidende 73 470; Stavanger Aftenblad 59 262, Fædrelandsvennen 38 845 (Opplag.no).
4. Printed editions 2012: Aftenposten n=467, Bergens Tidende n=468, Stavanger Aftenblad n=533, Fædrelandsvennen n=469. Printed editions 2013: Aftenposten n=578, Bergens Tidende n=528, Stavanger Aftenblad n=577, Fædrelandsvennen n=440.
5. The application Web2PDF is an app for Mac that saves web pages in PDF format with HTML codes included.
6. PDF versions of: www.aftenposten.no; www.fvn.no; www.aftenladet.no and www.bt.no.
7. Online editions 2012: Aftenposten n=464; Bergens Tidende n=428; Stavanger Aftenblad n=315; Fædrelandsvennen n=443. Online editions 2013: Aftenposten n=536; Bergens Tidende n=394; Stavanger Aftenblad n=368; Fædrelandsvennen n=396.
8. The categories were designed to be mutually exclusive and registered variations within the following broad topical categories: Politics, Crime, Economy, Social Issues, Culture, Everyday Life, Sport and Accidents (and Other).

9. Inter-coder reliability was established using 2 independent coders measuring Cohen's Kappa (k). Included in the reliability sample were the printed editions of Stavanger Aftenblad 25 January 2013, Bergens Tidende 28 January 2013 and Fædrelandsvennen 29 January 2013. Reliability was measured on content: 84%/.80 (n=238), and geographic location: 87%/.80 (n=255). As Cohen's Kappa is a conservative measure (in cases of high distribution and low variance), measures above .70 are considered acceptable (Neuendorf 2002:143-151).

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Appendix

Table 1. Overview of Findings (%)

Newspaper	Local		Regional		National		Foreign	
	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
Aftenposten print	11	18	3	2	56	54	30	26
Aftenposten online	15	15	3	6	47	45	35	34
Bergens Tidende print	25	27	11	14	43	37	21	22
Bergens Tidende online	33	40	20	15	29	24	18	21
Aftenbladet print	27	34	22	14	35	35	16	17
Aftenbladet online	34	40	16	20	36	28	14	12
Fædrelandsvennen print	33	40	27	17	25	30	15	13
Fædrelandsvennen online	28	51	44	33	18	12	10	4

Note: Local, regional, national and foreign news online and in print.
n= see footnotes 4 and 7.