

# The Reporting of News in Scandinavian Countries

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## 1. Background

In the past the reporting of news seemed to be of little interest to social scientists in Sweden. The view of society and the world at large as presented in newspapers was generally assumed to be unproblematic. Instead researchers investigated the manner in which newspapers commented on the news in their editorials.

A change came about in the 1960's when a general debate on the supply of news arose. It was claimed in several quarters that the flow of news reported by the Swedish mass media had a 'Western orientation.' It was said among other things that our view of the world is distorted, and that news reporting in Scandinavia is biased in favor of the industrial countries, primarily the Western ones.<sup>1</sup>

The debate has had a stimulating influence on research. The Scandinavian countries have adopted a primarily American research tradition. The studies have been concerned with news agency work and with the contents and functions of the news supply. The so-called gate-keeper function has often been made the focus of interest both in debate and research. The idea behind gate-keeper studies has been to analyze the role of journalists in news work. Examples of research questions are: What does the news material look like? How is international news arranged? What view of the world do the various media present to their subscribers?<sup>2</sup>

The interest in studies of news reporting can be directly linked with an increasing use of quantitative content analysis in media research. Much of the research in this context has been directed toward more or less broad surveys of the news flow. Different investigations have sought to illustrate a number of special news reporting situations. With few exceptions, no theory-building analyses have occurred in Scandinavian research.<sup>3</sup>

In this article we shall deal with the four Scandinavian news agencies. We shall

\* This article is a summary of our study 'Nordisk Nyhetsförmedling. En studie av de nordiska nyhetsbyråernas utrikesredaktioner' (The Flow of News in the Scandinavian Countries. A study of the foreign news editorial staffs of the Scandinavian news agencies), carried out at the Institute of Political Science in Göteborg 1971.

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attempt to characterize the people working at the foreign desks and to penetrate the structure of the news. Our intention is to study the framework within which the foreign news editorial staffs work and to give a view of Scandinavian reporting on the international news flow. We have aimed to observe more closely the so-called gate-keeper function and have tried to analyze this function in a systemic perspective.

## 2. The Conceptual Framework

Our starting point was an information theory perspective on the so-called gate-keeper. From this point of view news reporting can be seen as a chain of communication processes: from local correspondent to world agency, from world agency to national agency, from national agency to mass media, and from mass media to consumer. We are thus dealing with what we can denote as different news systems. A news system – in this very meaning – refers to the selection of news by an editorial staff and the influence on it of the social environment in which this takes place. The different systems are linked to one another as news is reported.<sup>4</sup>

Gate-keeper – the linking mechanism between the news systems – was originally a sociopsychological term, introduced by the American psychologist Kurt Lewin. He describes the gate-keeper concept in the following way: ‘The constellation of the forces before and after the gate region is decisively different in such a way that the passing or not passing of the unit through the whole channel depends to a high degree upon what happens in the gate region.’<sup>5</sup>

The term ‘gate-keeper’ referred originally to each institution, within organizations of a political, social, and/or economic nature, which decides upon an inflow and outflow of information, norms, rules, and so on. The concept, has, however, become more and more synonymous with the editorial selection of news by agencies and in mass media.

The study of gate-keeper has according to Lewin two elements: 1) the gate-keeper must be identified and 2) the factors guiding the decisions must be analyzed. Lewin emphasizes that an understanding of ‘the gate’ is equivalent to an understanding of the factors that influence the gate-keeper’s decisions.<sup>6</sup>

The gate-keeper can from this perspective be regarded as the link between different news systems. An analysis of the gate-keeper function thus gives an idea of the conditions that apply to news reporting.

A closer look at the gate-keeper function shows that it consists of three main components: an input system, an output system, and the gate-keeper region itself. These components determine the framework that applies to news reporting work.<sup>7</sup> This approach may to some extent coincide with a decision-making theory perspective: news reporting consists in fact of a long series of decision-making situations.<sup>8</sup> By this we understand: choosing to pass on incoming information or not and choosing between different ways of arranging the information. The appli-

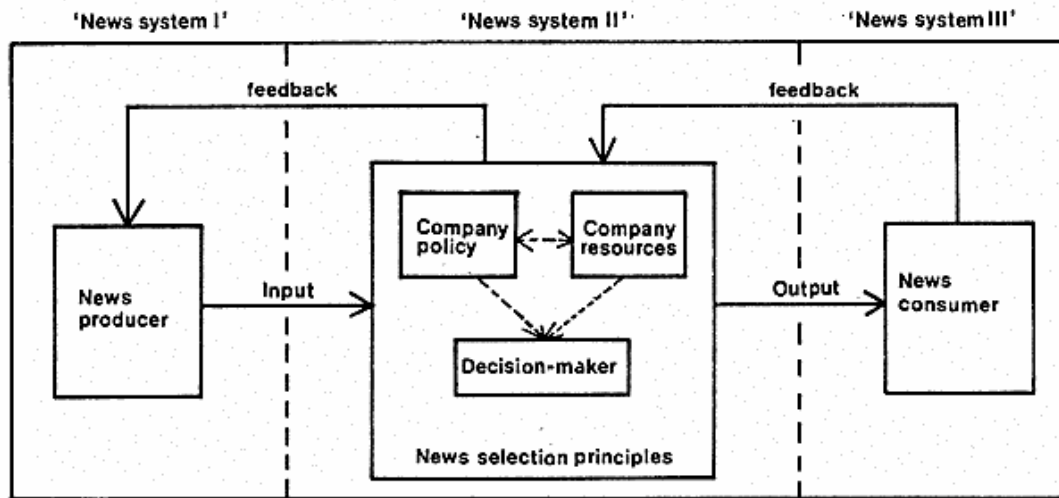


Figure 1. A System of News Flow.

cation of these decisions is what is usually called 'principles of news selection.' The approach outlined here is systematized in Figure 1.

To illustrate our reasoning we shall take as an example the working method of a news agency. The foreign desk of an agency has a given amount of incoming material – news about certain events – which is produced by various international news agencies. A group of journalists on the editorial staff do the arranging and editing. There are certain given consumers for the agency's material – the daily press, radio, and TV, which are subscribers to the agency.

The incoming material is determined by what the producer considers to be relevant news. The news enterprise that handles the reporting has a defined editorial and economic environment. The media subscribing to the material have certain demands: they want to present a certain kind of information to their customers, the private consumers of news.

We can thus distinguish three important elements in a news reporting situation, namely a producing, a transmitting, and a receiving element. The question is how these are related to one another. What are the roles played by incoming material, operative conditions, and demands from subscribers vis-a-vis the selection that takes place? The underlying question is: What role does the gate-keeper function really have in news reporting?

What makes a study of news agencies' operating principles particularly valuable is the fact that the agencies influence the *news image* reported to the public. News image here means the view of 'reality' presented by mass media. It would seem clear, too, that what is here denoted as news image will probably also play a decisive part in the individual's view of the world around him. While it is true that foreign information has seldom been regarded as 'opinion forming' in the traditional sense, the question is whether or not the news image reported contributes to people's formation of a *world image*, i.e. how the world functions and why.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Method and Material

Our main purpose has been to study those factors that condition the news image that Scandinavian agencies present to their subscribers. We describe the agencies according to the analytical scheme set out in Figure 1, which shows the basis for a survey among agency staff members. We also describe the agencies by a content analysis of incoming and outgoing news telegrams.

The survey was conducted during the spring of 1970 and consisted of a questionnaire sent out in March to all editors and journalists on Scandinavian foreign editorial staffs. This group consisted of 46 people at the time of the survey and answers were received from 39. The general purpose was to obtain a picture of the journalists' attitude to and experience of the three elements of the news system – producing, transmitting, and receiving. We have tried to operationalize this in the following way:

1. The journalists were asked to *describe* the work of a news agency, for example what policy they attributed to the company and how the editing of incoming telegrams is done.

2. The journalists were asked to state their *attitude* toward the various elements in news reporting, e.g. how they assess the subscribers' way of utilizing the material and how they view the international agencies.

3. The journalists were asked to state how much *contact* they have with the various elements, e.g. how often they are contacted by press, radio, or TV, or how often they themselves contact international agencies.

The purpose of the *content analysis* was to systematize the news image conveyed by the telegrams. The operationalizing of the concept of news image has been done with the aid of variables such as: *agency of origin, type of material, declaration of source, subject matter, and geographical area.*

The telegram survey covered eleven days, during October 15 to November 15, chosen at random but excluding Sundays. The unit of analysis comprised a single telegram and the unit of measurement was the number of items.

The brevity of the time span may be considered a serious limitation. General tendencies in the material may be difficult to grasp. It should be emphasized, however, that the quantity of eleven days' in- and outgoing news to an agency is very extensive, in our case over a million words. Since the period was, in addition, what in news context may be described as a 'normal period,' there should be some opportunity for general conclusions. But we are aware of the empirical limitations and that the results in many respects may be sketchy.

### 4. The Scandinavian News Agencies

During the same period that the large international agencies (Agence Havas, Reuter's, Wolff) were being founded, national news agencies were also begun in the smaller countries of Europe as well. Their task was partly to gather and distribute news within their own countries and partly to acquire foreign news material for their subscribers from the world agencies.<sup>10</sup>

In this way national agencies were founded in the Scandinavian countries. Denmark's *Ritzau's Bureau* (RB) was formed in 1866, and the following year came the *Svenska Telegrambyrå* (SvT) and the *Norsk Telegrambyrå* (NTB). The *Finska Notisbyrå* (FNB) was started in 1887. During the first world war other Swedish news agencies competed with SvT. This led to the formation of a new agency *Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå* (TT) in 1921.<sup>11</sup>

The Scandinavian agencies have the same general structure, and they are all cooperatively owned by the daily press of each country. The newspapers, together with radio and TV, are also the news agencies' main subscribers.

As far as foreign news is concerned, the Scandinavian agencies have in principle the same incoming material. Thus all the agencies subscribe to Reuter's service for northern Europe (EUN). They also subscribe to AFP's English language line to Scandinavia and the German dpa's 'Europadienst.' The English edition of Tass is likewise used by the four agencies. FNB receives in addition a Finnish language service from Tass, arranged and translated at the local office of Tass in Helsinki. The Scandinavian agencies also cooperate with other national news agencies.

Scandinavian cooperation means a daily exchange of domestic material considered to be of interest to other Scandinavian countries. The news is then distributed via the Scandinavian line to the receiver. Another form of cooperation consists of a common network of joint correspondents, who at the time of this study were in Moscow, Brussels, and New York.

Each Scandinavian news agency has a domestic and a foreign desk. The foreign desk, supervised by an editor directly subordinate to the agency's managing director, has a deputy editor and may be said to work independently of other sections of the news agency.

## 5. The Journalists

The journalists working at the foreign desk occupy a central position in the news flow. A large number of telegrams come in daily from all over the world. The journalists assess them: reject them or pass them on in a more or less revised form. What type of journalists are engaged in this work? What kind of background do they have? What kind of working environment do they have?

### *Recruiting*

The Scandinavian news agency journalist is generally a man in his thirties with a university education. He has been fairly recently appointed to the foreign desk. He has varying qualifications. The age distribution among the foreign staff shows that it is mostly younger people who are engaged in news agency work.

Five staff members at NTB, five at RB, and six at TT were at the time of the survey under thirty years old. TT, however, has both a younger group and an older group of journalists, the latter with an average age of somewhat over 50.

The comparatively low average age indicates that most of the foreign editorial staff have been employed for only a short time, though there is no systematic cor-

relation between length of employment and age distribution. FNB's staff has, for example, a comparatively long duration of employment, without having a particularly higher average age – more than half of the FNB journalists have been employed by the agency for seven years or more.

It is clear that academic studies as an educational background are the most common 'theoretical' asset. Almost the entire editorial staffs of FNB and NTB are university educated; none of the RB journalists were. The TT staff has an even distribution between university and other education, although the agency has, compared to the Swedish corps of journalists as a whole, a certain overrepresentation of academics.<sup>12</sup>

What other qualifications, such as linguistic ability, experience abroad, and practical work-experience, do these journalists bring to the job? Their knowledge of languages follows the expected pattern: they have a good command of English, are relatively fluent in German, and have only a limited command of French. Generally they know neither Russian nor Spanish.

The news agency journalists have very little experience – i.e. studies and/or jobs – abroad before their appointment. Only a few staff members mention experience of this kind.

*Table I. Earlier Journalistic Experience*

Journalistic work*	FNB	NTB	RB	TT	Total
More than five years	—	3	4	4	11
Less than five years	—	1	4	2	7
No experience	10	5	2	4	21
Total	10	9	10	10	39

\* By journalistic work we mean mainly employment at a newspaper, radio-TV, or a news agency.

It can be seen from Table I that about half of those questioned had journalistic experience. RB and TT account for the greater part of these. On the other hand, it is remarkable that none of those at FNB who answered mention earlier newspaper experience or the like. Evidently they all came directly from academic studies.

A comparison of the four foreign desks reveals a number of interesting similarities and differences. Most of the staff members are fairly young and recently appointed. Independent of this, however, there seem to be two types of qualifications: on one hand a fairly extensive *theoretical* (academic) education and little or no experience of journalistic work (e.g. FNB) and on the other predominantly *practical* experience – longer journalistic activity, (e.g. RB).

#### *Editorial Work*

The division of work varies from agency to agency. At TT practically all the journalists sometimes act as editor-on-duty, i.e. they take editorial responsibility.

The position is by and large the same at RB. At FNB only half of the staff members have this duty at some time.

It has been mentioned above that the main tasks of the agency journalists are to assess, arrange and translate incoming telegrams. A picture of this process is given in Table II.

Table II. Treatment of Total Incoming Material\*

Method of editing	FNB	NTB	RB	TT
Reiteration	5.0	5.4	4.8	6.5
Adaptation	3.4	5.6	5.5	7.3
Totally revised	8.4	11.0	10.3	13.8
Discarded	91.6	89.0	89.7	86.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

\* Percentage of incoming material.

The greater part of the material is rejected after an initial assessment. It is mostly a question of 'duplicate material' – all the news agencies deliver roughly the same news in more or less the same form.

The proportion of the telegrams arranged and edited varies slightly from agency

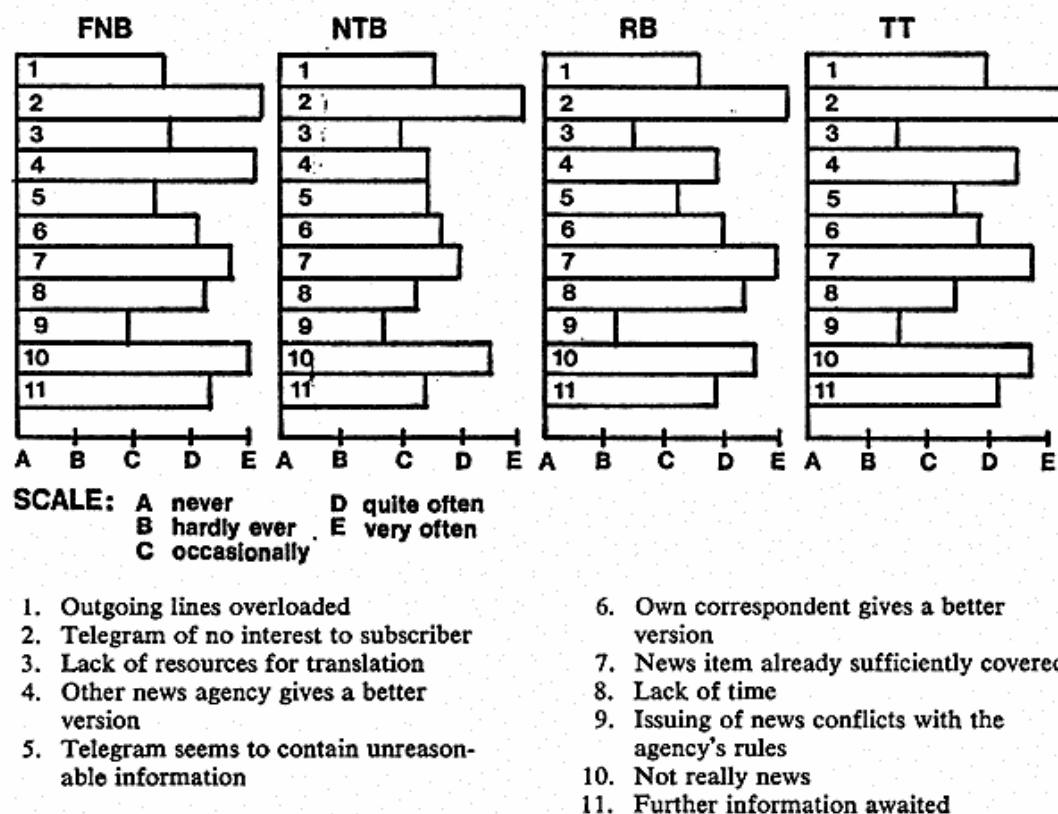


Figure 2. Question: Attempt to show how often the following motives occur as a reason for rejecting incoming telegrams and not passing them on.



to agency. The differences between the agencies are marginal as regards discarded material. They are mainly due to differences in editorial resources. Another relevant factor is the balance between the coverage of domestic and foreign services. RB has, for example, a more 'foreign-oriented' tradition. Different editing principles also play a certain role – a lot of work is done at RB on the assembling of separate telegrams, something which also occurs to some extent at FNB.

The main part of the incoming material is discarded. Which principles dictate these rejections? Some idea of this can be gained from Figure 2, which shows that the most common assessments are 'of no interest to subscribers,' 'news already sufficiently covered,' and 'not really news.' A comparison of the agencies shows a striking consistency.

Table III is a correlation analysis based upon the journalists' total assessments of why incoming material is not passed on. This shows the marked similarities among the agencies. The consistency in the selection of news seems to be greatest between NTB and TT and least between FNB and NTB.

*Table III. Correlation Analysis\* between the Scandinavian News Agencies' Different Assessments in Editing News Material*

	TT	RB	NTB
FNB	.78	.88	.64
NTB	.91	.80	
RB	.86		

\* Spearman-Brown rank correlation.

A more detailed analysis of the work at the foreign desks would probably show that the editing is a matter of intensive teamwork. Asked how they treated a telegram of whose content they were uncertain, most of the journalists replied that they solved the problem by discussions with their colleagues. Very rarely did they look outside the agency for supplementary information.

The work of the news agency seems also in other respects to be a matter of teamwork. Editing principles appear to be the responsibility of the entire desk – management and employees – and not the individuals. The group shapes the news reporting, and the agency's policy is created and transmitted in this way. Similar results have also been shown in other investigations.<sup>13</sup>

The description of the editorial work indicates that it is hardly possible to pick out – as has often been done – one or two individuals as gate-keepers. The whole desk, its environment and work climate, will be the gate through which international news has to pass.

## 6. The News Material

We assumed earlier that the agencies, by means of their news reporting, contribute toward shaping the individual's view of the world. It is probably of im-

portance, therefore, to try to describe the outgoing news material. Are there, for example, any differences in the material offered to the Norwegian newspapers and the news transmitted in Finland? Do the Stockholm newspapers receive material different from the Danish Radio? Does the news image vary among the Scandinavian countries?

Table IV shows which news producers are used by the Scandinavian agencies. There are some interesting differences. Over half the material NTB offers its subscribers comes from Reuter's. FNB also uses a lot of Reuter's material.

*Table IV. News Material According to News Producer\**

News producer	FNB	NTB	RB	TT
Reuter's	49.7	52.8	39.1	43.5
AFP	17.6	13.5	18.8	24.3
dpa	5.0	1.9	6.9	7.4
Tass	1.5	0.3	0.5	0.5
Scandinavian agency	11.1	12.5	14.7	9.1
Correspondent	9.5	16.7	16.1	12.8
Other agency	5.6	2.3	3.9	2.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

\* Percentage of the total outgoing material for each agency.

The greatest proportion of AFP material is found at TT, where about a fourth of the foreign news comes from this agency. dpa material is used to about the same extent by all the agencies with the exception of NTB, which uses remarkably little material from the West German agency. Tass plays a very small part in the distribution of news to Scandinavia. Internal Scandinavian material is, on the other hand, of great importance, as is also the material from joint correspondents.

So it is primarily Reuter's material that the Scandinavian agencies use. This applies above all to NTB and FNB. RB and TT differentiate somewhat more in their selection of material.

*Table V. Places of Origin of Scandinavian News Material\**

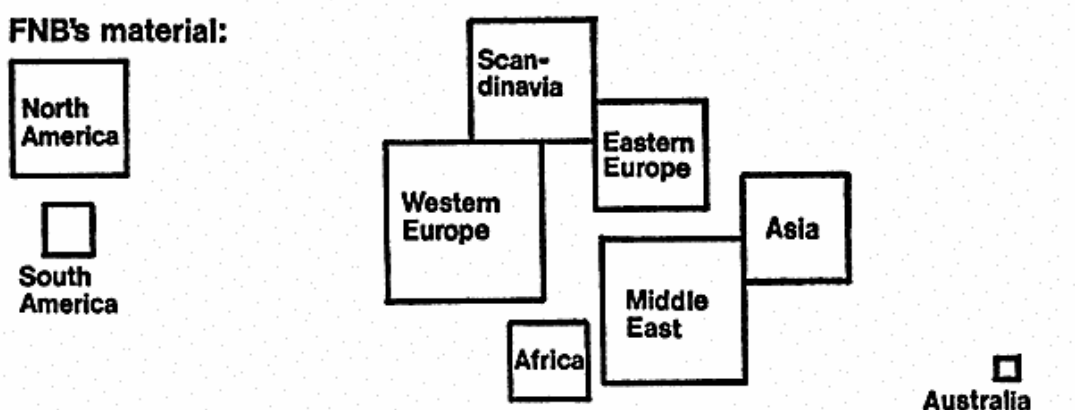
FNB		NTB		RB		TT	
New York	60	New York	71	New York	83	New York	92
Moscow	56	London	41	Stockholm	70	London	50
Stockholm	50	Stockholm	32	Moscow	57	Washington	41
Washington	41	Copenhagen	29	London	51	Moscow	35
London	29	Moscow	28	Bonn	42	Paris	34
Beirut	26	Paris	26	Washington	39	Saigon/Hanoi	31
Cairo	25	Washington	25	Paris	35	Beirut	31
Copenhagen	24	Brussels	22	Brussels	34	Cairo	28
Brussels	19	Prague	20	Cairo	32	Tel Aviv	24
Paris	18	Saigon	19	Copenhagen	26	Copenhagen	24
Total number of places of origin	153		142		143		118

\* Number of telegrams.

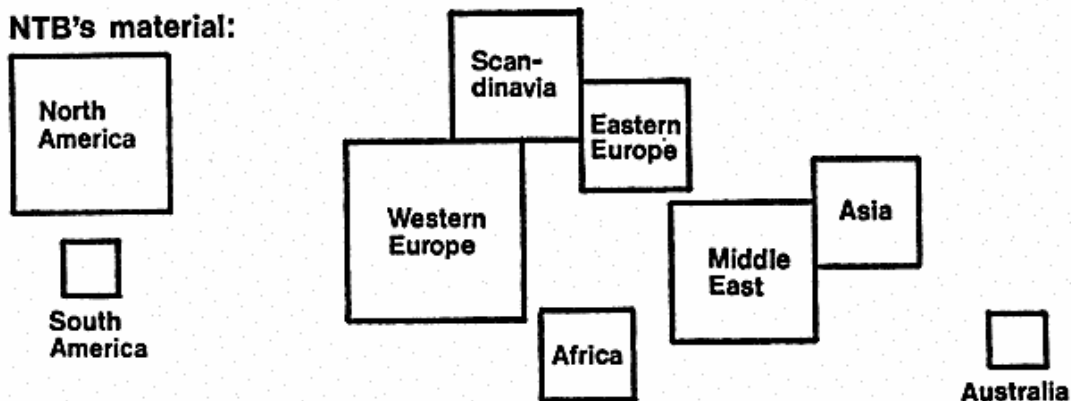
As concerns the geographic origin of news telegrams, it may be reasonable to assume – bearing in mind the role played by the great international agencies – that the big cities of the Western world occupy a focal position as news centers. The ten most common places of origin stated in the telegrams are shown in Table V.

A telegram dispatched for example from London need of course not only deal with British matters. We have therefore investigated which geographical area or country is covered in the news reporting. It may here be reasonably assumed that news from North America and Western Europe predominates. The result of the analysis is shown in Figure 3. 'The Scandinavian news image' is illustrated here.

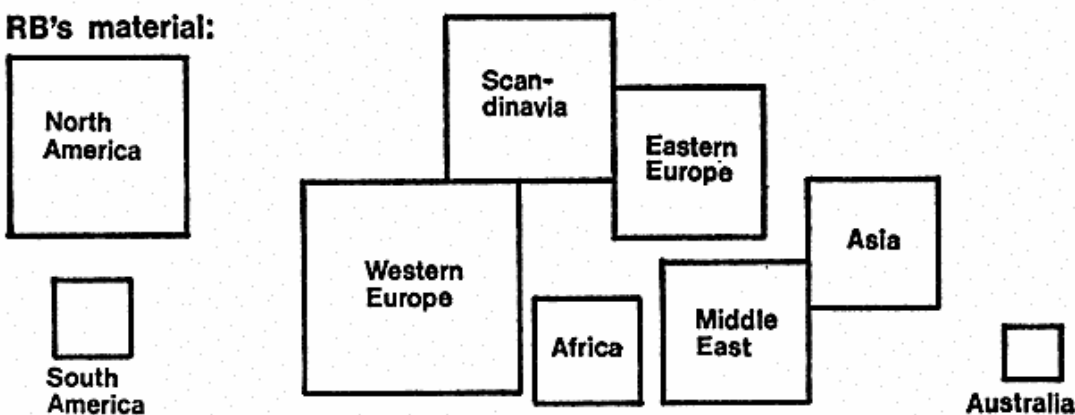
#### FNB's material:



#### NTB's material:



#### RB's material:



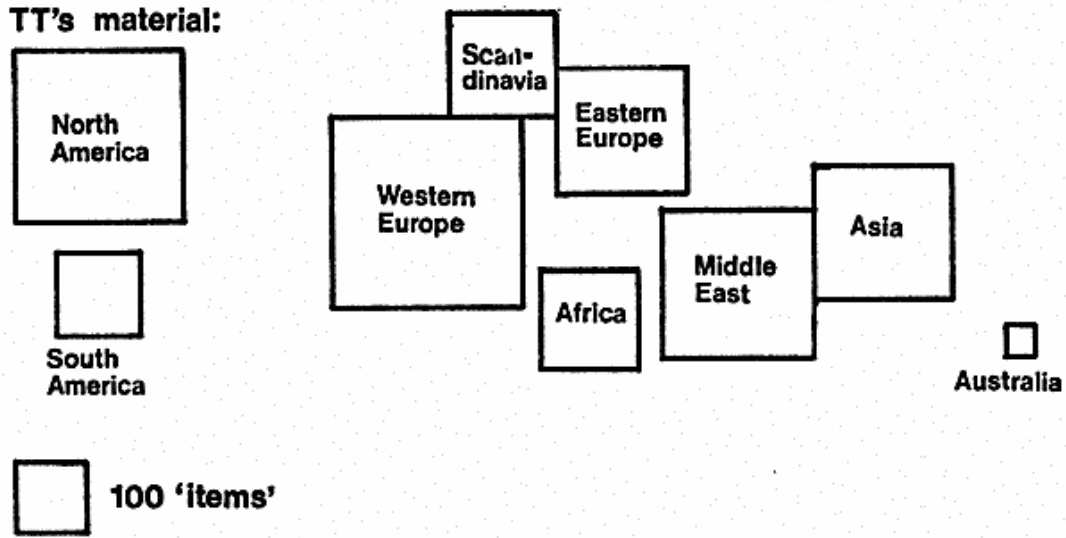


Figure 3. The Scandinavian Agencies' News Material According to the Geographical Area Treated.

Figure 3 shows, as expected, that the reporting, mainly covers the highly developed industrial countries. Other parts of the world like South America and Africa are treated very sparingly. The news image transmitted is tempered in the

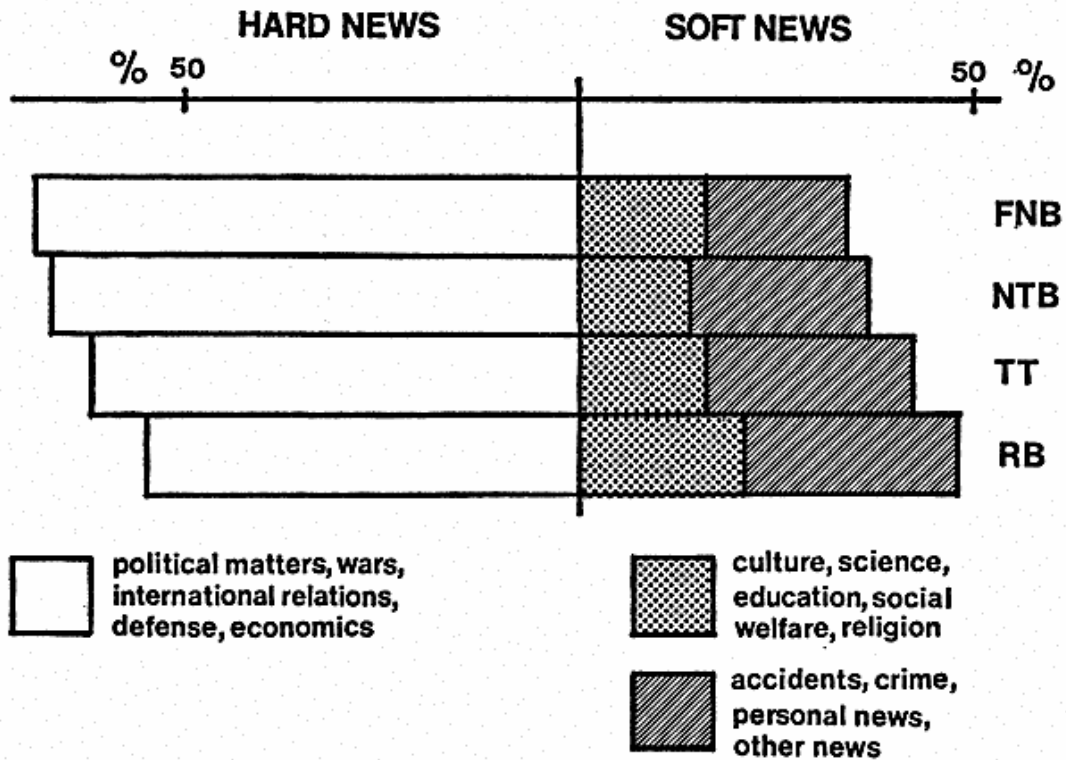
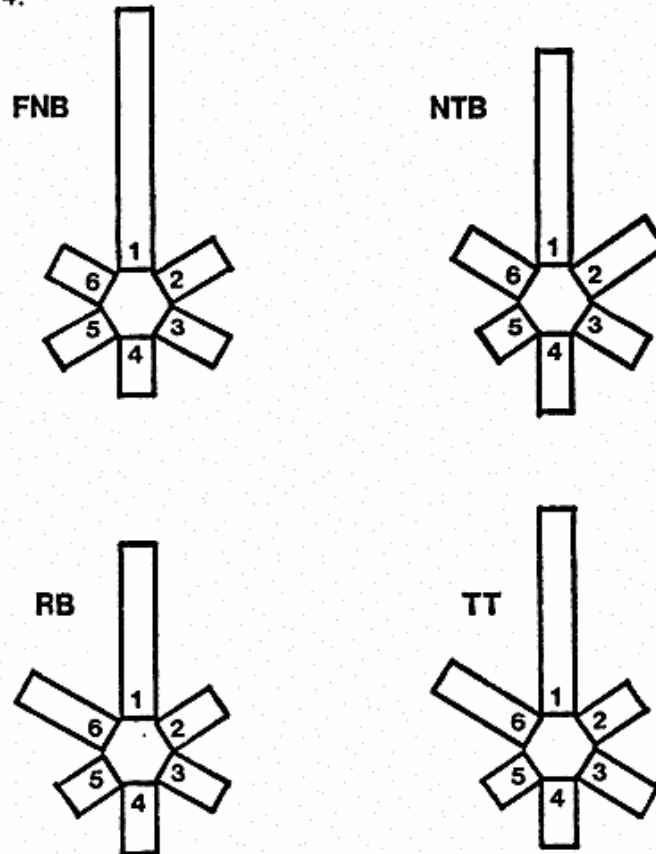


Figure 4. News Material According to the Content.

first place by events in the so-called 'rich world.' It is news of events in the USA and Europe that dominates.<sup>14</sup>

The news that reaches us from the third world comes from areas of conflict with an international dimension: e.g. the Middle East, Vietnam, and Nigeria/Biafra. Here there is undoubtedly considerable agreement among the Scandinavian news agencies as to the so-called 'principles of news evaluation.' The selection of news is done on similar principles in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, and Helsinki.

Finally, as regards the content of the news material, a division into subject matter and areas may take place according to different principles. In earlier surveys a division into hard news and soft news has often been used. Hard news refers to news of political events, wars and international conflicts, defense, and economics. Soft news consists partly of news about culture, science, education, and religion (social news) and partly of material dealing with accidents, crime, and private individuals (human interest).<sup>15</sup> A division according to these criteria has been made in Figure 4.



1. International politics and military matters
2. Domestic political matters
3. Political demonstrations, strikes
4. Trade and economics
5. Cultural matters
6. Accidents and crime

Figure 5. News Material According to Some Categories of Contents (percentage of outgoing material).

Studying the specific categories of contents, one finds that the news material is dominated by political events. News of military and economic matters is also given a prominent position. The differences between the various agencies are small. Here too, agreement on news selection is probably decisive. The dominating categories of contents are shown in Figure 5.

The content analysis demonstrates great similarities among the news agencies' outgoing material. They use the same news producers and apply in general the same principles to their news evaluation and selection. Their subscribers thus receive fairly uniform foreign material. One can probably speak of a common news image in Scandinavia.

## 7. The Journalist at the Desk

In this part we shall attempt to analyze the position of the agencies from a more general perspective. The starting point is the analytical scheme presented at the beginning, where the three elements assumed to influence the editorial principles – 1) the company's policy and resources, 2) the subscribers/receivers and their demands, 3) the producers and their supply – were pointed out. The question is now how these various elements of the reporting process decide the final product.

We approach this question in two ways: 1) investigating the views of the staff on news reporting and 2) making an input-output analysis of the news material. This analysis is made in section 8.

### *The News Journalist and the Company*

In the debate on news reporting it has been maintained from time to time that the economic interests of the news companies directly govern the structure of the news material. It is stated that the economic and editorial framework restrict the journalist in his work.<sup>16</sup> Against this background we are here interested in how agency journalists feel about the company's policy and resources.

*Policy.* Rules and norms for news activity are only to a limited extent codified. While, for instance, the radio corporations in Scandinavia have fairly detailed regulations about the principles of their news reporting, the agencies have only general policies with certain regulations for technical details.<sup>17</sup>

If one studies the foreign reporter's view of his work, one finds almost complete agreement with the official view of the agency. The news reporters consider broad and correct news reporting a cardinal principle. At the Danish and Swedish agencies the demand for a journalistic and clearly written news product is also stressed.

The explanations for this homogeneity in attitude toward news reporting are varied. Social and professional behavioral processes naturally occupy a central role. Within each country one has learned, through upbringing in general, education, and earlier professional experience, what is understood as 'news.'<sup>18</sup>

A closer analysis of 'critical' situations shows, however, that differing views on certain kinds of news reporting do sometimes occur. These seem to play a very

small part and are said as a rule to depend on generational differences. Clearly there is by and large an identical view of the reporting process on the part of the agency management and the employees.

*Resources.* Despite the common view of news principles that prevails, editorial staffs are not satisfied with the resources available. At all the agencies – though less pronounced at TT – the staffs want more resources. The results here may seem obvious: it is natural to strive for increased resources. The question then is in which areas should such an expansion of resources be made. The distribution of answers to this question is shown in Table VI.

*Table VI. Question: If you consider that the agency's resources should in any respect be expanded, in what area should this take place?\**

Answers	FNB	NTB	RB	TT	Total
1. Better staffing of main office	6	7	7	4	24
2. Extended network of correspondents	2	8	7	6	23
3. Improved technical equipment	5	2	2	3	12
4. Improved contacts with subscribers	2	—	3	3	8
5. Extended service by means of more news subscriptions	2	—	1	3	6

\* By number of replies given.

A fairly uniform pattern of replies shows that staff reinforcement of the main office and the agencies' input are wanted above all. The Finnish journalists underline the bilingual aspect. It is, according to the staff of FNB, particularly in this sector that resources should be invested.

The opinions put forward indicate that the editorial staffs want an expansion of input material. Dependence on the great international agencies ought to be reduced by means of an extended network of correspondents. The FNB staff feels, however, that their agency does not receive the same benefit from foreign correspondents, whom they consider to be more Denmark-, Norway-, Sweden-oriented in their reporting.

We can conclude that the staff members at the foreign desk appear on the whole to be satisfied with their working conditions. They agree with their agency's policy, but seem to feel somewhat restricted by the given framework, which is primarily due to economic resources. The latter is also emphasized by the analysis of a question about how independent they feel in their work. The replies show that it seems to be the lack of resources which is felt as a restraint: various organizational matters place obstacles in the path of effective work. This applies most to FNB and least to TT.

#### *The News Journalist and the Public*

The main task of the foreign editorial staffs is to supply newspapers, radio, and TV – the agencies' subscribers – with foreign news. These media can then de-

side whether or not to use the agency material. When the material is used, it is as a rule done by reproducing the telegram without much re-writing. Deletions may occur.<sup>19</sup>

It may be observed that there are two receiver categories for the reported material: partly primary receivers, or the subscribers and partly secondary ones, or their readers/listeners. Whom does the agency journalist regard as his principal audience?

*Conceived audience.* To get an idea of which audience they write for, the agency staffs were asked to give their opinion of the following four statements:

1. In the selection of news one must continually have regard for what may be of interest to the agency's subscribers.
2. The most essential thing in the selection of news is to have regard for the interests and wishes of the public.
3. The agency's subscribers should receive more complete material as a basis for their own news selection.
4. Newspapers, radio, and TV should not make such great changes in the agency material.

Agreement with statements 1 and 3 indicates a more media-oriented news reporting; press, radio, and TV are seen as the main audience. Agreement with statements 2 and 4 indicates a more consumer-oriented view, a concentration in the first place on newspaper readers, radio listeners, and TV viewers.

On comparing the agencies one finds that TT may be characterized as somewhat more media-oriented than other agencies, while NTB tends to be more consumer-oriented. The outline given here can of course be diversified by looking more closely at the standpoints of the individual journalists. There are representatives of both a consumer- and a media-oriented view within each of the staffs. It is also clear that this is part of the news agency journalists' dilemma. As a TT staff member pointed out: a news journalist's most important task is 'to give the subscribers what they want,' but it should also be 'to inform about what we think the readers should take an interest in.' A member of FNB summarized his view in this way: 'To serve objectively both subscribers and the public.'

*Degree of utilization by the media.* News agency staff members demonstrate good judgment of news material in the press, radio, and TV. Their impression of the degree of utilization corresponds on the whole to measurements made of the contents of daily press, radio, and TV.<sup>20</sup> One notices, for example, the sparing use of foreign material from the agencies by the big national papers, and differences in use by radio and television.

What are the views of the agency staff members as to the underlying reasons for the media's selection of news? The result is illustrated in Table VII.



Table VII. Question: In cases where telegrams are not used by your subscribers, what do you consider are the most usual reasons for this?\*

Reason	FNB	NTB	RB	TT
Too detailed	—	1	1	1
Other material used	6	4	6	9
AP/UPI material used	5	3	4	6
Material from own correspondent used	7	8	7	9
Political reasons	2	4	—	—
Too late	5	2	3	6

\* By number of replies given.

Table VII shows that some competition is felt by the editorial staffs from the newspapers', radio's, and TV's own foreign correspondents. The two American news agencies AP and UPI – which have their own offices in Scandinavia – are also important competitors with the Scandinavian agencies.

Further analysis shows that the agencies have a good idea of the variations that exist in news assessment among different types of newspapers. On the whole, however, they appear to be satisfied with the subscribers' ways of using the agencies' products.

*Subscriber contact.* How much contact is there with subscribers and what do such contacts consist of? Generally speaking it can be said that the direct contact between the foreign editorial staffs of the Scandinavian agencies and their subscribers is surprisingly limited. According to TT these are most often connected with technical problems in transmission. Discussions on the material's contents or editing principles hardly ever seem to occur between the subscribers and the foreign editorial staff members.

A central question is how this limited contact should be interpreted. It probably indicates that the subscribers are fairly well satisfied with the news reporting. The selection principles of the agency and its subscribers clearly coincide.

#### *The News Journalist and the Input Material*

So far we have studied two elements in the reporting process: the internal position at the company and relations with consumers. In what follows, attitudes to the news producers will be examined.

*Attitude to producers.* The largest producers of news to Scandinavia are Reuter's, AFP, dpa, and Tass. To get an idea of the agency staff members' views of these, we asked them to assess each agency with the aid of a so-called semantic differential. A selection of the assessments is shown in Figures 6a–6c.

It can generally be concluded that the three largest – Reuter's, AFP, and dpa – are given positive assessments as regards speed and reliability. The basis of assessment narrow-minded/broad-minded shows a more hesitant attitude, primarily in the case of TT and also to some extent from FNB. NTB and RB estimate the agencies fairly highly even here.

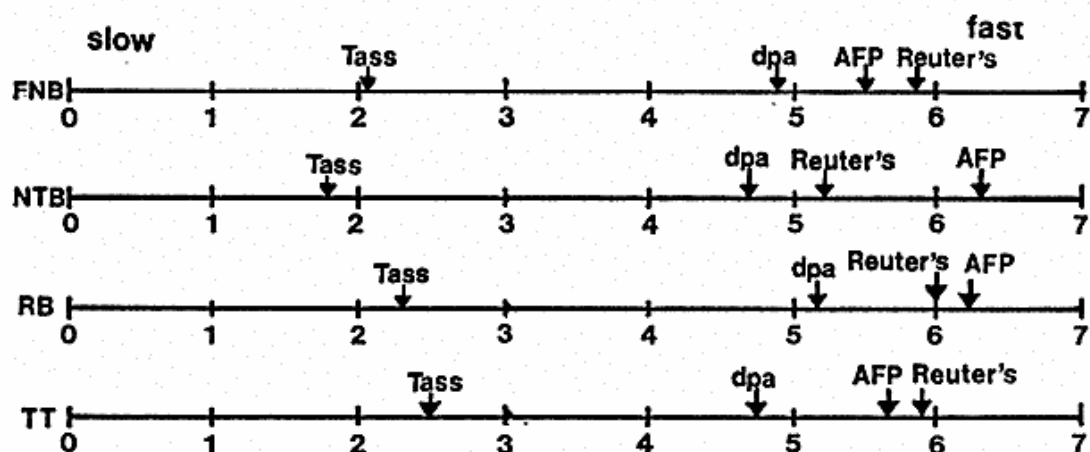


Figure 6a. The News Producers as Assessed by the Journalists. Basis of Assessment: fast/slow.\*

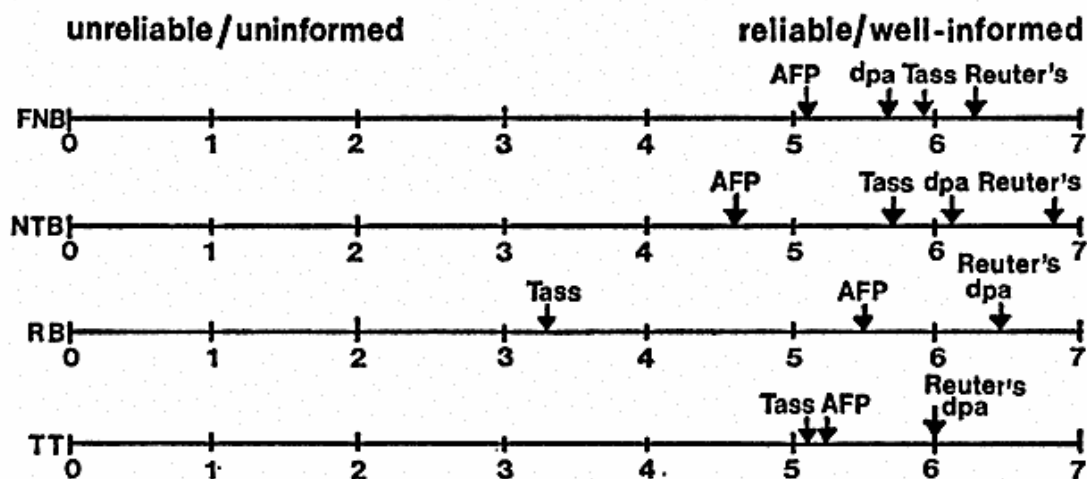


Figure 6b. Basis of Assessment: Reliable/Unreliable and Well Informed/Uninformed.\*

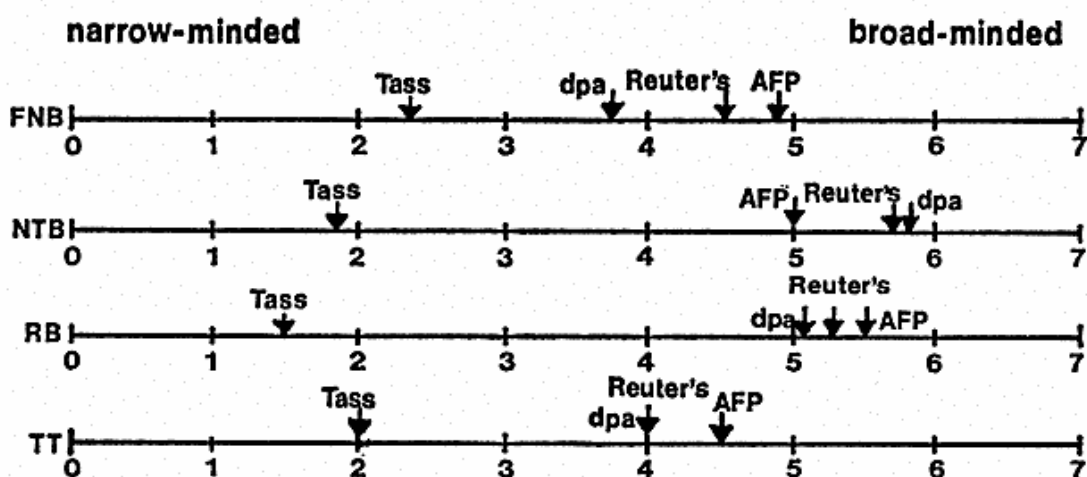


Figure 6c. Basis of Assessment: Narrow-Minded/Broad-Minded.\*

\* Means for each agency.

As regards the individual agencies, Reuter's is the agency with the highest average values, though the differences between Reuter's, AFP, and dpa are marginal. Some differentiation of the picture may be observed: Reuter's and dpa are considered somewhat more reliable, AFP is the fastest agency, while the three are on the whole equal as regard broad-mindedness.

The result may possibly be interpreted in this way. It is thought that the big agencies do a good job, but that their material has certain faults in its coverage. Attitudes to the agencies are based on experience of the news material. Very few contacts with the producers are at hand. The contacts that do take place mainly concern technical issues.

*Attitude to material.* What views do the foreign editorial staffs have on the international news material that is distributed? An analysis of staff members' attitudes shows that they are on the whole satisfied with the material. There are, however, certain categories of contents where unsatisfactory coverage is noticed. This applies primarily to cultural and social matters.

As regards geographic regions, it is considered that Western Europe and the USA are given satisfactory coverage. Otherwise there is greater doubt. The coverage of Latin America and China are considered particularly unsatisfactory. An outline of this is given in Table VIII.

Table VIII. Views on the Representation of Certain Geographical Areas\*

Area	FNB	NTB	RB	TT
Western Europe and USA (except Scandinavia)	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.8
Eastern Europe and USSR	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.5
Africa, Asia, and Latin America (except South Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia)	1.8	1.6	1.8	1.6

\* Means for each agency. Scale: 1 = unsatisfactory, 2 = less satisfactory, 3 = satisfactory.

The inquiry into the views of the foreign editorial staffs on input-output material shows a differentiated outlook. They seem on the whole to have a positive view of the big agencies' working procedures, but they are more doubtful about certain parts of their news coverage.

## 8. Input-Output Analysis

The incoming material during the survey period covered altogether more than 100,000 telegram lines or about a million words. A very small part of this is passed on to subscribers. The proportion forwarded lies between 8 and 13 percent of the incoming material.

*The producers.* From where do the Scandinavian agencies get their foreign material? Figure 7 gives us information about that.

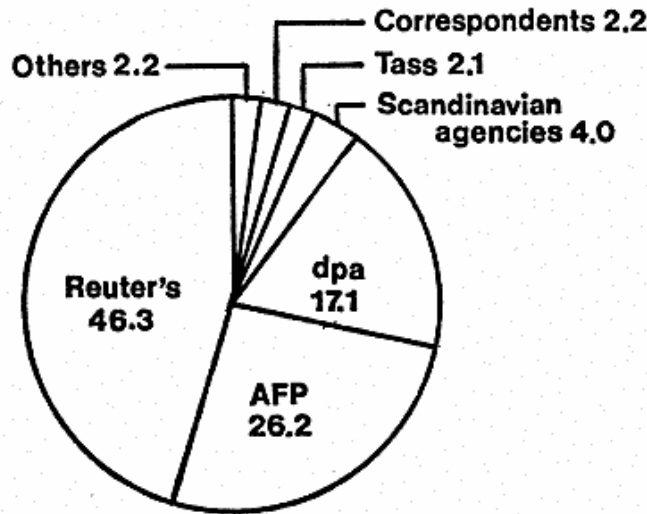


Figure 7. Incoming Material Distributed According to News Producer.

Reuter's, AFP, and dpa together account for as much as 90 percent of the material delivered to the Scandinavian agencies. Reuter's is the dominant supplier. We can now compare the outgoing material with the incoming as regards news producer. This comparison is reproduced in Figure 8.

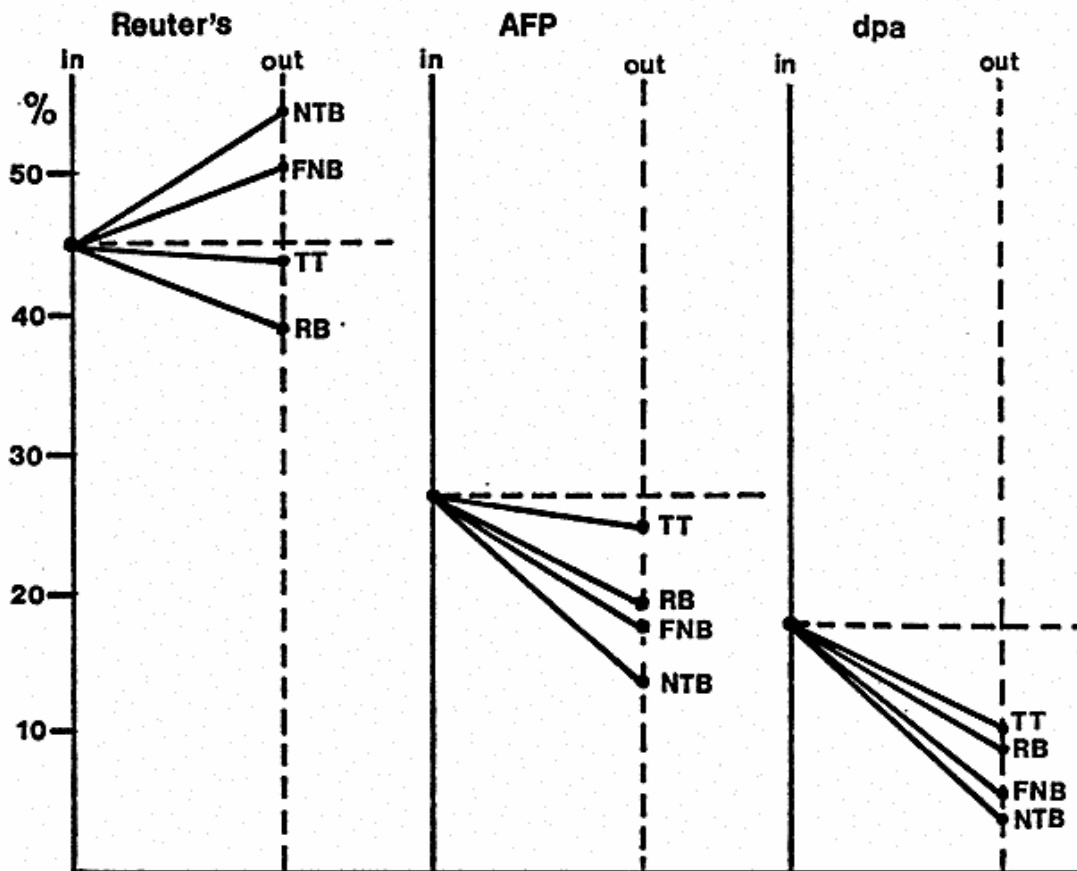


Figure 8. A Comparison between Incoming and Outgoing Material with Regard to News Producer.

Figure 8 indicates that the bigger a producer, the more indulgent the treatment it gets. So the tendency is for Reuter's material to be discarded to a less than AFP's, and AFP's less than dpa's. The similarities among the Scandinavian agencies are great.

*Type of material.* If we study the character of the international news material, we find small differences among the news producers, although AFP has a larger amount of official material. This is confirmed by analyzing which sources the agencies use in their news reporting.

Table IX. Incoming Material Distributed According to Source\*

Source	Reuter's	AFP	dpa	Others	Total
Official source	29.8	33.4	18.9	24.2	28.3
Newspaper, radio, TV, etc.	5.6	9.9	10.4	6.3	7.6
Other source	10.4	6.6	4.4	11.4	8.5
Unidentified source	9.4	10.9	3.9	5.2	8.4
No acknowledgment of source	44.8	39.2	62.4	52.9	47.2

\* By percentage of total incoming material.

A comparison between the incoming material and the telegrams that the Scandinavian agencies pass on to the subscribers shows that they have taken on the official air of the larger agencies. They clearly have here a common attitude to news.

*Places of origin and geographical area.* Are there any differences in the world view in the incoming and the outgoing material? We have in this case studied places of origin and the geographical area covered.

Table X. Places of Origin of Incoming News Material\*

1. New York	325	6. Bonn	211	11. Copenhagen	122
2. Paris	322	7. Saigon	173	12. Prague	120
3. Washington	261	8. Brussels	149	13. Rome	111
4. London	250	9. Beirut	137	14. Tel-Aviv	108
5. Moscow	238	10. Cairo	128	15. Athens	100
Total number of places of origin = 435.					

\* By number of telegrams.

Table X shows the centers that exist in the international news network: the big Western cities and Moscow account for a great majority of all news telegrams. A comparison with the telegrams that are passed on by the foreign editorial staffs shows small differences. A further example of this is found in Figure 9.

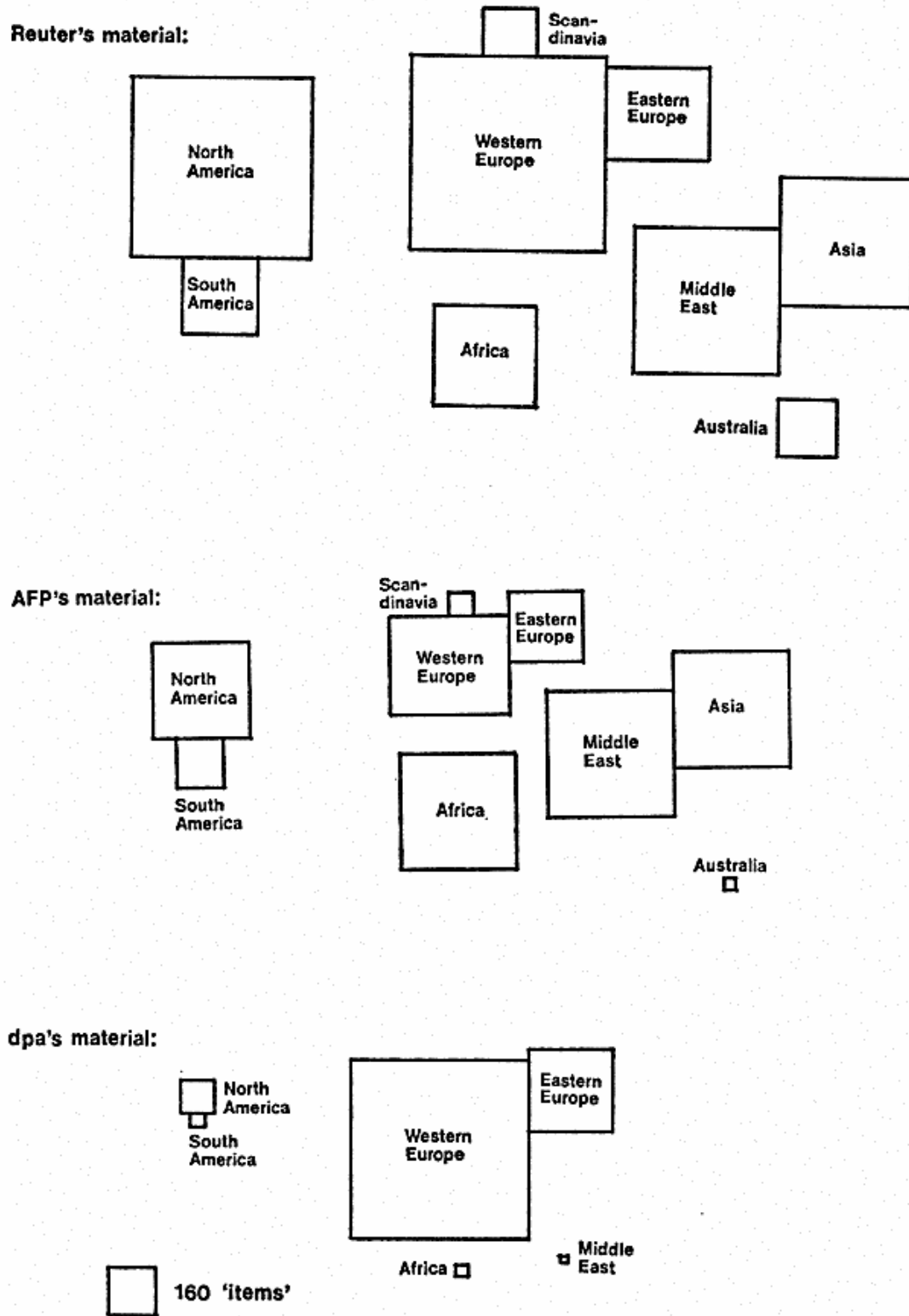


Figure 9. Material from Three World Agencies Distributed According to Geographical Area.

The news map exhibits the expected pattern, with the emphasis on Western Europe and North America. Reuter's is the dominant supplier from most parts of the world. AFP has a relatively large proportion from Africa and Asia, and dpa puts its main emphasis on Western and Eastern Europe. This differentiation indicates the agencies' earlier division of the world into spheres of interest.<sup>21</sup>

If one compares the news image which the Scandinavian agencies distribute to their subscribers with the news image they themselves receive, one finds great similarities. The extent to which different parts of the world are covered can be illustrated with the aid of Figure 10.

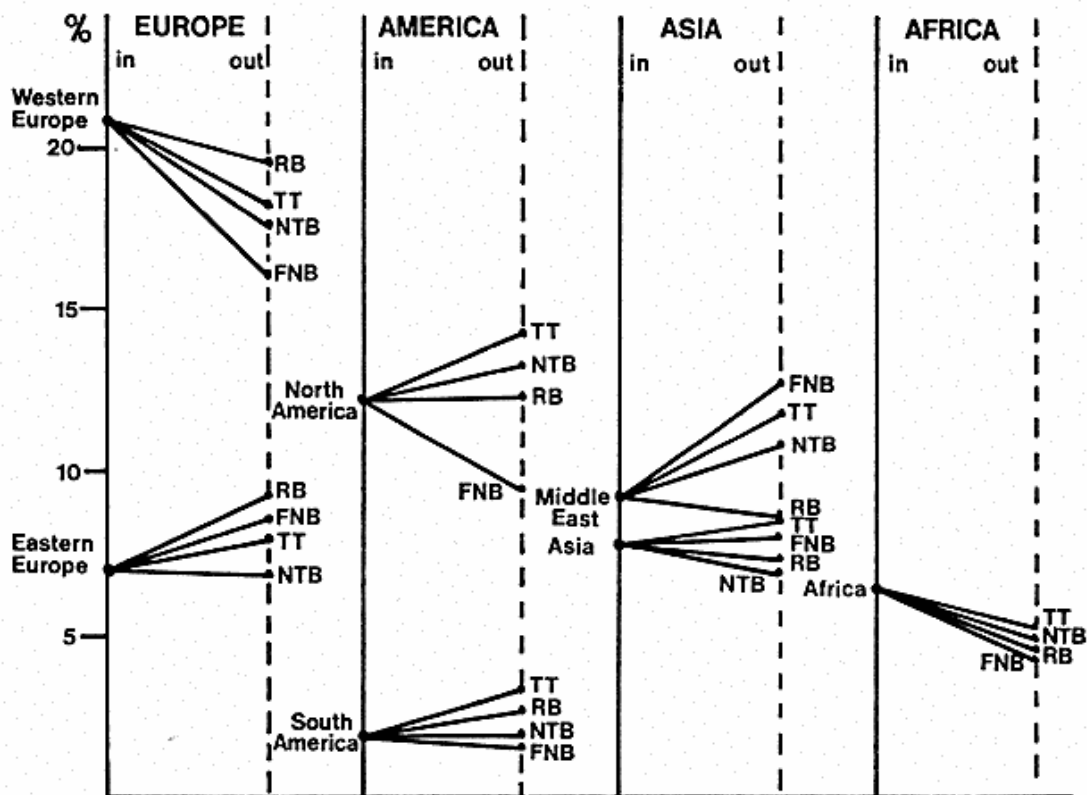


Figure 10. A Comparison between Incoming and Outgoing Material with Respect to Geographical Area.

This Figure demonstrates a fairly similar assessment of news among the agencies. The divergence is greatest as regards news about North America and Western Europe. A possible explanation may be that the agencies add to such news material from their own correspondents. Another tendency is to give priority to material covering conflicts.

*Contents.* A description of incoming material with regard to content (hard and soft news) is shown in Figure 11.

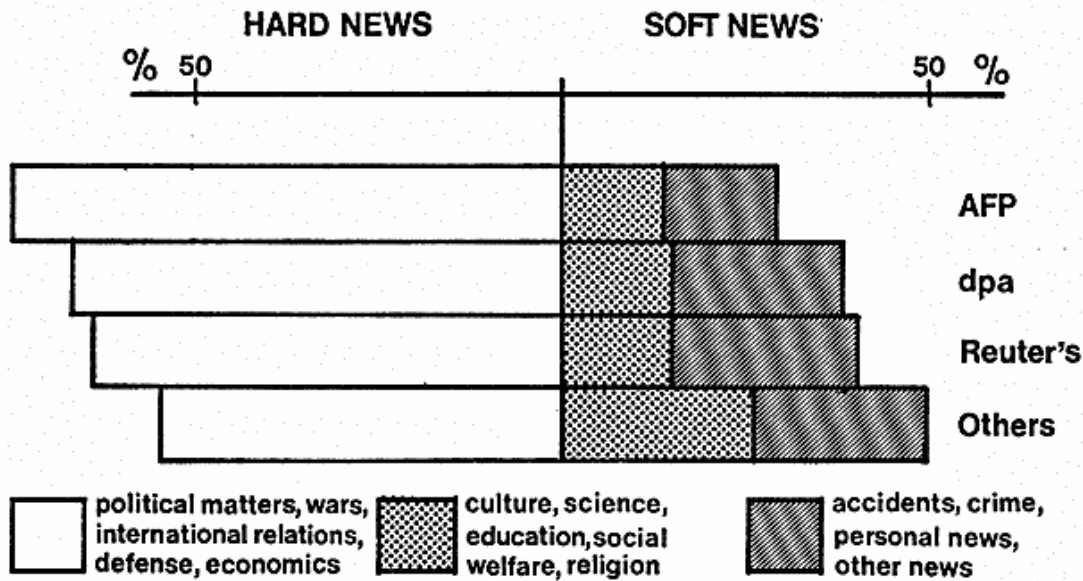


Figure 11. Distribution of Incoming Material According to Content.

It may generally be said that AFP distributes rather heavy material. Priority is given to political news of domestic and international character. Reuter's and dpa have certain similarities in content, although greater weight seems to be given at dpa to news about trade and finance.

We may conclude that the material that the Scandinavian news agencies send out to their subscribers bears very great similarity to the incoming flow of news. The differences that occur are just small deviations. Thus all the agencies seem to be fairly bound by their input: they are bound by the selection of the larger news producers. The similarities are striking as regards origin, sources, character, and content. The news agency tradition that has evolved within the Western news system characterizes Scandinavian reporting. What differences there are apply possibly to geographical distribution, where factors such as geographical proximity and conflict often emerge.

## 9. Perspective

Earlier we gave an idea of the attitudes of the four Scandinavian countries to the international flow of news. One main result is that the similarities between the incoming international news material and the material passed on to each Scandinavian country are very significant.

Consequently the input material determines the work of the news agencies. Even though the staff members are not always completely satisfied with what the international news producers provide, they are in their work dependent on the news image of the large agencies.

There seems to be a fairly similar conception of news within each country. The journalists' view of their own company and its function, like their relationship with



the agency's subscribers, indicates this. A uniform news concept characterizes both the news agency and its subscribers. To stretch a point, it can be said that the gate-keeper function at an individual news agency does not seem to be of much interest in itself. The crucial point is the relationship between the international news system and the concept of news in the individual receiver country.

#### *News Image and Political Communication*

If we summarize our analysis in terms of the introductory schedule, we shall find that the emphasis on the gate-keeper region as the central component in news reporting seems considerably exaggerated. In fact, the reporting situation seems on the whole to be determined by two components, the input system and the output system. It is the relationship between these two that decides what news selection criteria shall be applied by the editorial staff.

1. *The producing system* is an international news system. This in turn is divided into a number of smaller national systems, with different kinds of relations to the receiving system. It is logical that the nations which play a prominent part in the international news system will also have a greater influence over the news reporting in the world.

2. *The receiving system*, a national news system where both the agency and the subscribers of one country are found. Within this system there is on the whole agreement as to what shall be designated as news. Of course there are clearly differences of opinion between various subsystems – newspapers of different politi-

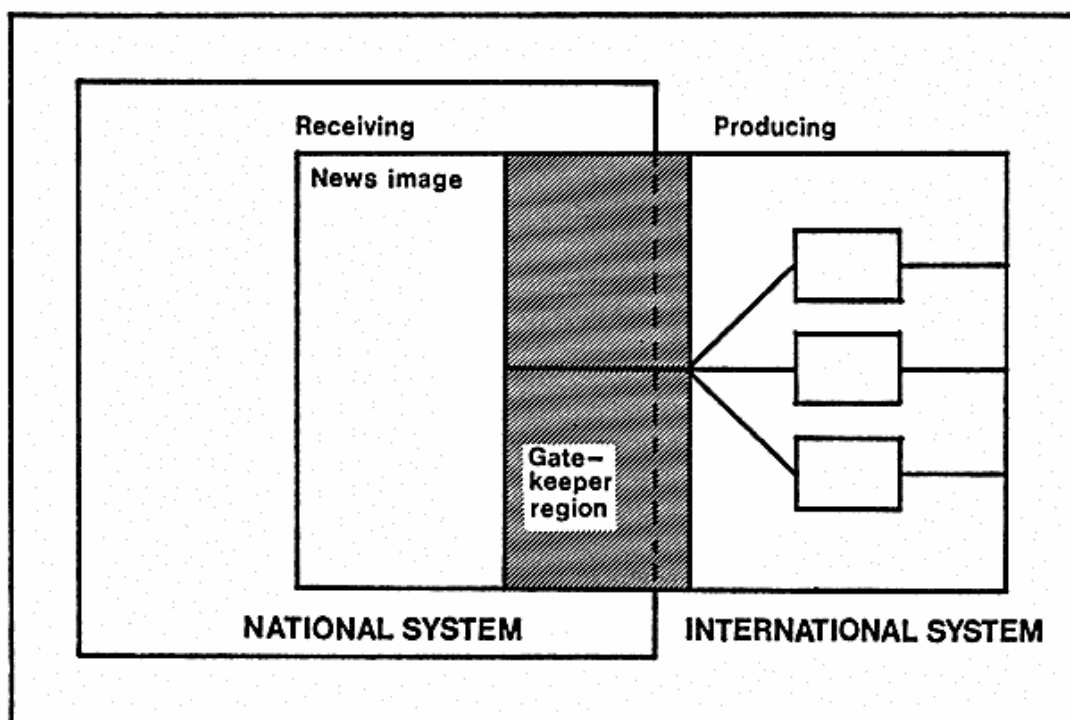


Figure 12.

cal color, pressure groups, etc. On the whole, however, there exists a generally accepted concept of news.

The question is what the conditions for reporting of news between the two systems are. Generally speaking, it can be said that reliability is closely correlated to distance between the systems. This distance holds various dimensions. The three main dimensions may be said to be space, time, and culture. Culture should here be taken to mean, for example, differences of ideas and social customs. Since distance is only a relative measure, it follows that the attributes of each system will determine the appearance of the news flow and condition the news image presented to the national public. This can be summarized graphically in Figure 12.

It is obvious that this approach gives a framework for analyses of news and information reporting. A fundamental requirement is consequently that each analysis of information must be related to one or another type of system. The information must not be seen as isolated from its environment. Some of the ambiguities in news research probably depend on the lack of defined context in which the news reporting is studied. Much too much stress has been laid on a pure gate-keeper process, or on general news descriptions. The social system approach as put

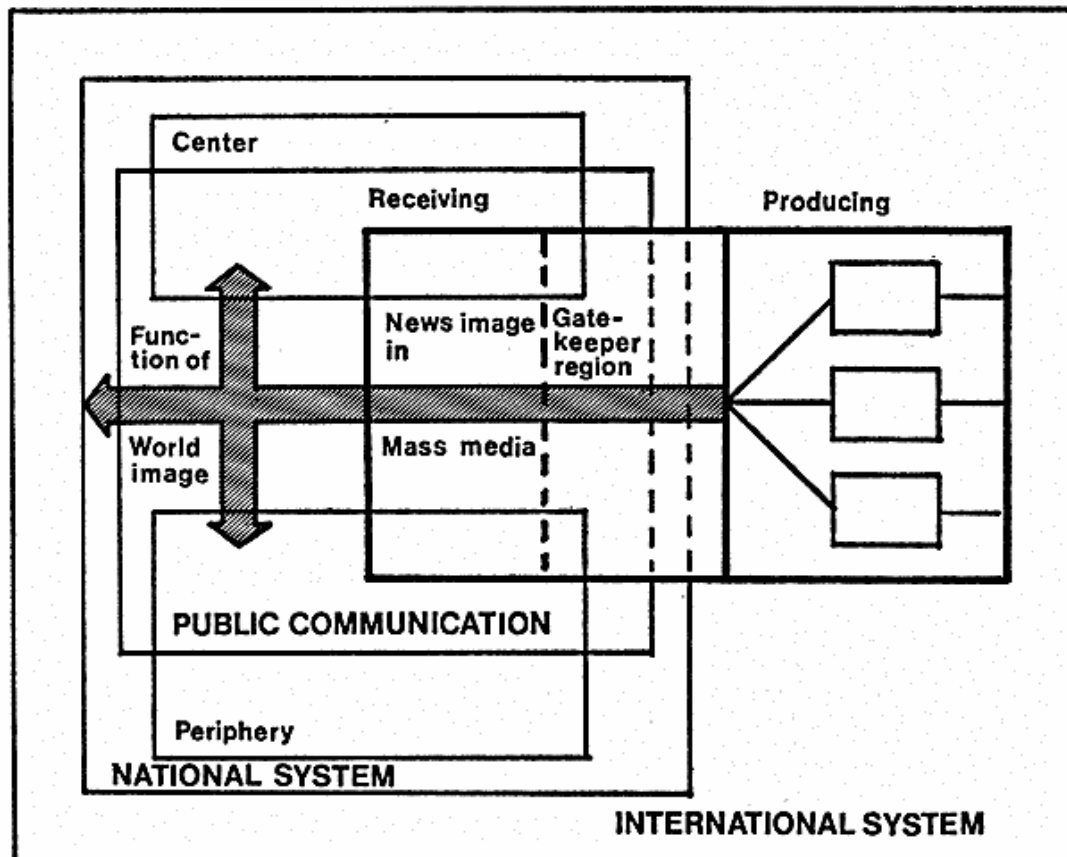


Figure 13.

forward here is on the other hand no novelty. It emanates from sociological theory building, but it does not seem to have been used for an analysis of international political communication.<sup>22</sup>

It seems reasonable that much international news reporting can be properly studied as political communication by introducing a political system approach. Such a method of analysis should obviously be linked with a wider analysis of the national political system. From this point of view it becomes of great interest to study what news norms characterize different subsystems: press, radio, TV, in one country. What part do these play in the news image presented nationally? What function does the news image then have in the creation of a world outlook and political opinion among individuals and groups in society? The main question of a political analysis of news reporting is: What significance does the importation of international political material have for the evolution of the national political system?<sup>23</sup>

We can summarize graphically our analysis of the international news flow to the Scandinavian countries. This schematic outline is given in Figure 13.

Investigating more systematically those factors that condition the transmission of national and international news should certainly become a more important part of future research in political communication.

#### NOTES

1. Cf. Göran Palm, *Indoktrineringen i Sverige*, Stockholm: Pan/Norstedt, 1968. Christer Hellmark, Bernt Lindberg, and Karl-Ola Nilsson, *Ni har väl läst tidningen i dag?* Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1969. Paul Hübner (ed.), *Information oder herrschen die Souffleure*, Reinbek 6. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1964, and Einar Östgaard, 'Factors Influencing the Flow of the News,' *Journal of Peace Research* 1, 1965, pp. 39-63. Cf. also the debates of the 17th General Conference of Unesco, October 17-November 21, 1972, Paris.
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4. Cf. Colin Cherry, *On Human Communication*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1966, and Wilbur Schramm, 'Information Theory and Mass Communication,' *Journalism Quarterly* 32, 1955, pp. 131-146. See further Christian Kristen, *Nachrichtenangebot und Nachrichtenverwendung*, Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 1971, p. 30.
5. Kurt Lewin, 'Frontiers in Group Dynamics II. Channels of Group Life, Social Planning and Action Research,' *Human Relations* 1, 1947, p. 145.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 145f.
7. Cf. for example Gerhard Maletzke, *Psychologie der Massenkommunikation*, Hamburg: Hans Bredow Institute, 1963, and C. Kristen, *op.cit.*, p. 199.

8. See for example Malcolm Warner, 'Decision-Making in Network TV News,' *Television Quarterly* 7, 1968, pp. 60-75.
9. Cf. Walter Lippman, 'The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads,' in Wilbur Schramm and Donald Roberts (eds.), *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971, pp. 265-286.
10. *News Agencies: Their Structure and Operations*, Paris: UNESCO, 1953. See further *De l'Agence à l'Information Havas à l'Agence Francepresse, 1835-1957*, Paris: Aamunition, 1959, and Graham Storey, *Reuter's Century, 1851-1951*, London: Parrish, 1951.
11. Jan-Otto Modig, 'The Scandinavian News Agencies,' *Gazette* 9, 1963, pp. 143-148.
12. *Journalistkåren i Sverige*, Stockholm: Gebers, 1970, p. 88.
13. Cf. Warren Breed, 'Social Control in the News Room, Functional Analysis,' *Social Forces* 33, 1955, pp. 326-341, and Aleksander Matejko, 'Newspaper Staff as a Social System,' in Jeremy Tunstall, *Media Sociology*, London: Constable, 1970, pp. 168-180. See further Manfred Rühl, *Die Zeitungsredaktion als organisiertes soziales System*, Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 1968.
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16. E.g. Hellmark, Lindberg, and Nilsson, *op.cit.*, pp. 121ff, and S. I. Beglow, *Millionären Machen Meinung für Millionen*, East Berlin: Staatsverlag der DDR, 1971, pp. 47ff. These examples, however, are mostly concerned with newspaper reporting.
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18. See further, Oliver Boyd-Barrett, 'Journalism Recruitment and Training. Problems of Professionalization,' in Tunstall (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 181-201. Jay G. Blumer, 'Producers' Attitudes towards Television Coverage of an Election Campaign: A Case Study,' in Paul Halmos (ed.), *The Sociology of Mass Media Communicators*, Staffordshire: University of Keele, 1969, pp. 85-117.
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22. See e.g. J. W. Riley and M. N. Riley, *Mass Communication*, New York: Basic Books, 1959; I. R. Merton, L. Broom, and L. Cottrell (eds.), *Sociology Today*, New York: Basic Books, 1959. Melvin de Fleur, *Theories of Mass Communications*, New York: David Mc Kay, 1970, and Maletzke, *op.cit.*
23. See further some articles in Heinz-Dietrich Fischer and Johan C. Merrill (eds.), *International Communication*, New York: Communication Art Books, 1970. Cf. also the outlines of research formulated by UNESCO expert group, *Proposal for an International Programme of Communication Research*, Paris: UNESCO, September 1971.