



RUSSIAN REPORTS

STUDIES IN POST-COMMUNIST
TRANSFORMATION OF MEDIA AND
JOURNALISM

Edited by
Jan Ekecrantz and Kerstin Olofsson

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4. Changing journalism in a changing society: the case of the Karelian republic

Jukka Pietiläinen

Introduction: society and the press in change

The growing role of the regional press is one of the most important changes to occur in the restructuring of the mass media system of the Soviet Union and Russia. During the late Soviet period the share of Moscow-based national newspapers (30 papers in all) was almost half of the circulation of the Soviet press. In the Russian Federation as a whole the Moscow-dominance was even more strongly felt because outside Russia, particularly the Baltic States and Transcaucasia, much of the local media were in non-Russian languages. In the Russian republic nearly three-fourths of the newspapers were Moscow-based, although the actual circulation in Moscow was lower because the papers were distributed to the non-Russian republics in the Soviet Union as well.

The Soviet press system was like a pyramid: each administrative unit had its own media, which were usually both the organs of the local party organisations and the local administrative units.

Newspapers were “organs” of the administrative units and their party organisations. The regional press was subordinated to the national newspapers, which were in a better position to criticise local authorities. Stories in national newspapers and speeches by the party bosses were reprinted in the regional newspapers. On the other hand, the regional newspapers were closer to the public and so they could but also, according to the official guidelines, should pay attention to the more concrete problems.

In terms of media structure and circulation, the Soviet society seemed on the surface to resemble a modern Western European society; however, the underlying reality was more complex. Despite modern structures the traditional relations between people remained an important factor. In Soviet society the press was not so much a source of information – although there was a considerable information flow – as an institution that set the “official agenda”. The functions of the press were to provide official truths, channel criticism in an appropriate way and to help people to participate in government-initiated campaigns and development plans. According to the Soviet doctrine the press should also report on the positive experiences of the more advanced work places and participate in the development of the economy.

Since the official media were controlled and their functions mostly ritualistic, information was transmitted through unofficial channels such as individual networks and rumour. This had both positive and negative consequences for the transmission of information. A Soviet study on public opinion, information and the press (*Massovaya informatsiya v sovetskom...* 1980) showed that during the post-war years information on such topics as the most common types of crimes in the city of Taganrog, the number of people who were without proper housing and developments in the industrial sector was spread through friends, relatives and “personal experience” much more often than through the media.

One of the explanations for the spread of information through informal channels was that the citizens’ agenda was not journalism’s agenda. For example, according to an opinion poll the most serious problems in Taganrog were housing and public

transport, but these issues received only minor coverage in the press. As far as social problems were concerned, the press was not setting the laymen's agenda. Just as there was a large (and perhaps growing) discrepancy between the modern facade and premodern society, so was there a glaring discrepancy between the official agenda and the laymen's (citizens') agenda.

The Soviet society has been called a "false" modern society (Srubar 1991). It may seem modern in many respects, but behind the official facade there still exist traditional networks through which deficient goods and services are exchanged and which still play a vital role in the economy. Another explanation of the Soviet style of modernisation is that while the Soviet society was successful in modernising its industries, it could not adapt to the post-industrial modernisation process which required more individual initiative.

In post-Soviet society the economic crisis and the collapse of "modernisation-from-above" have strengthened these informal networks, which might explain at least some of the changes that are taking place in the structure of the press. This chapter examines first the changes in the structure of press in general and then takes a closer look at the changes in mainstream journalism.

Changing structure of the press in Karelia

Karelia is one of the ethnic republics of Russia and is situated in the northwest, bordering on Finland. The population is about 800,000 of which 280,000 live in the capital, Petrozavodsk. Some 75% of the population is Russian and the remainder ethnic minorities consisting of Karelians (10%), Finns (2%) and Veps (0.8%). Nearly 90% of the population speaks Russian as the mother language followed by Karelian with 5%. Karelia is a sparsely populated urbanised area with forestry, mining and the metal works as its main industries (Oksa & Varis, 1994).

Karelia provides a typical example of the Soviet press structure. Three newspapers covered the whole republic – *Leninskaya pravda* (Leninist Truth), the main organ of both the local CPSU Committee, the Supreme Soviet and the Council of Ministers; *Komsomolets* (Komsomol, member of the Communist Youth Organisation), the organ of the regional Komsomol organisation; and *Neuvosto-Karjala* (Soviet Karelia), the organ of the party and administration in Finnish. Each of Karelia’s district (except the capital Petrozavodsk) had its own district newspaper supplemented by several lower-level newspapers such as that of the Onega tractor factory.

The press structure started to change at the beginning of 1990s when the number of regional newspapers expanded and the

Table 1. Newspapers of Petrozavodsk

Newspaper	Founded/closed	Language	Comes out
<i>Leninskaya pravda/ Severnyi Kurier</i> (Leninist Truth/ Northern Courier)	1917-	Russian	6 / week; from 1993, 5 / week
<i>Komsomolets/ Molodezhnaya gazeta</i> (Komsolian/ Youth Paper)	1920-	Russian	3 / week; from 1997, weekly
<i>Neuvosto-Karjala/ Karjalan Sanomat</i> (Soviet Karelia / News of Karelia)	1920-	Finnish	3 / week; from 1995, 2 / week
<i>Novosti dlya vsekh</i> (News for all)	1989-1993	Russian	Weekly
<i>Nabat Severo-Zapada</i> (Northwestern alarm bell)	1990-1993	Russian	Weekly
<i>Oma mua</i> (Own country)	1990-	Karelian	Weekly
<i>Petrozavodsk</i>	1991-	Russian	Weekly
<i>Kareliya</i> (Karelia)	1992-	Russian	2-3 /week; from 1996, weekly
<i>TVR</i>	1992-	Russian	Weekly
<i>Ves Petrozavodsk / Guberniya</i> (The whole Petrozavodsk / Province)	1995-	Russian	Weekly
<i>Nablyudatel</i> (Observer)	1996-	Russian	Weekly

circulation of the national newspapers began to drop off. In Petrozavodsk the first of the new generation of newspapers was *Novosti dlya vseh* (News for all), founded in July 1989 and published by the Council of Karelian Co-operatives. It was officially registered as an independent newspaper in October, 1990. At the same time a new independent newspaper *Nabat Severo-Zapada* (Northwestern Alarm Bell) was founded. Both of these newspapers are politically “democratic” and pluralistic, and publish a range of non-communist views from monarchists to social-democrats. These newspapers were printed in some 15,000 – 17,000 copies; compared with the 95,000 copies of *Leninskaya pravda*, they were small indeed (see table 2).

The attempts by the traditional newspapers to get free from their owner’s control caused conflicts between journalists and owners. The most serious struggle took place in *Komsomolets* where

Table 2. The print-run of main newspapers of Petrozavodsk at the beginning of each year.

Newspaper	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Leninskaya pravda/ Severnyi Kurier	133	126	95	95	35	28	30	25	21	14
Komsomolets/ Molodezhnaya gazeta	48	54	54	35	45	27	15	8	5	5
Neuvosto-Karjala/ Karjalan Sanomat	9	11	9	9	3	2	2	2	2	2
Novosti dlya vseh	--	15	17	12	8	--	--	--	--	--
Nabat Severo-Zapada	--	--	15	15	10	--	--	--	--	--
Oma mua	--	--	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
Petrozavodsk	--	--	18	35	40	51	48	39	40	36
Kareliya	--	--	--	--	5	6	5	5	7	6
TVR	--	--	--	--	50	60	65	62	70	71
Ves Petrozavodsk/ Guberniya	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	11	28	39
Nablyudatel	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	3
Total circulation	189	219	210	204	197	180	171	161	182	181

the journalists tried to wrest control from the Komsomol district committee. In October 1990 the journalists registered the newspaper in Moscow as multi-regional newspaper, but after losing the ownership battle in court it made plans to set up its own youth newspaper (which, however, were never realised). The conflict had a negative effect on circulation, but this was felt first at the end of 1991 and through 1992. In the other newspapers in Karelia the journalists became co-publishers without major conflicts.

After the August 1991 coup failed, the three major Karelian newspapers changed their names: *Leninskaya pravda* became *Severnyi Kurier* (Northern Courier), *Komsomolets* was renamed to *Molodezhnaya Gazeta Karelii* (Youth newspaper of Karelia) and *Neuvosto-Karjala* became *Karjalan Sanomat* (News of Karelia). This process had started even earlier: *Leninskaya pravda* had already had discussions about renaming the newspaper and in November 1990 and “*Severnyi Kurier*” appeared as the title of the first page of the news section. Furthermore, in 1991 “*Molodezhnaya Gazeta Karelii*” became the subtitle for *Komsomolets* and in *Neuvosto-Karjala* the word *Karjala* appeared in larger type than the word *Neuvosto*.

Two other newspapers were founded in the beginning of the 1990s: *Oma maa* (Own Country), the first newspaper in the Karelian language; and *Petrozavodsk*, a city newspaper whose orientation was more popularistic.

The independent, politically oriented newspapers lost their chance for survival in the economic crisis that followed the liberalisation of prices at the beginning of 1992. They managed to survive until the middle of 1993, but were then forced to close. The economic crisis affected also the traditional newspapers. As early as the beginning of 1992, an editorial in *Severnyi Kurier* warned its readership that the newspaper lacked almost three million rubles. This was a large sum compared with the 2.5 million rubles in 1992 subscription revenues collected at the end of 1991. The newspaper tried to make up the difference with advertisements, but eventually had to inform its readers that subscriptions would be cancelled at the end of June, after which a new and higher subscription rate would be introduced.

Nevertheless, the economic crisis created conditions in which new and more flexible newspapers could flourish. *Petrozavodsk* was sold mostly in kiosks and rising costs could be covered by raising the cover price, which rose from 80 kopecks to six rubles in 1992 and to 60 rubles at the end of 1993. Another newcomer, *TVR* (*Televidenie, radio and reklama*, [Television, radio and advertisement]) was launched in May 1992 when the simple 4-page program of the local state television company ran out of money and re-emerged as an 8-page tabloid with stories and advertisements in addition to TV and radio program listings.

As a result of the new subscription rates, *Severnyi Kurier* had lost more than half of its circulation by the end of June 1992. Also *Petrozavodsk* had to cancel subscriptions, but its circulation dropped only temporarily and by the end of the year was back to over 30,000 copies. *TVR* became the newspaper with the largest circulation at the end of 1992. *Severnyi Kurier* and *TVR* each had a circulation of 40,000.

Within the space of a year a press market dominated by single leading daily paper was transformed into a pluralistic market dominated by weekly newspapers. This trend continued through 1993 and 1994 when economic difficulties remained. For a time *Molodezhnaya gazeta* could challenge the other newspapers by providing lower subscription rates with the support of a sponsor, the Kondopoga paper mill, but the newspaper gradually lost its position among the widely read papers. The figures in Table 2 indicate that the drop in total circulation was not so big as was often reported. The main change was the rise of weeklies and the decline of daily newspapers.

The change of editorial policy also affected *Karjalan Sanomat*. The main part of its circulation (70-80%) was in Finland where it was read mainly by left-wing activists. When the newspaper started to publish more pluralistic views (e.g. advocating the reunification of pre-war Finnish territories to Finland), the readers protested and this, with the threefold increase of subscription rate to Finland, caused the loss of almost two-thirds of the circulation in Finland. *Karjalan Sanomat* also lost a large number of its journalists through emigration to Finland. To counterbalance these negative

developments, new life was infused into the newspaper by Finnish journalists and students who came to Karelia to practice journalism and contributed their considerable experience and working practices to the paper.

A more stable period of development began in 1995 when prices rose less rapidly. The weeklies dominated the market but were in heavy competition with one another. A new weekly was founded in 1996 when a group of journalists left *Petrozavodsk* and tried to launch an evening paper, *Ves Petrozavodsk* (The Whole Petrozavodsk). When this endeavour failed they started a successful weekly instead, *Guberniya* (Province). The only remaining daily paper, *Severnnyi Kurier*, gradually lost its circulation. In 1996 a quality weekly *Nablyudatel* (Observer) was started but reached only a small circulation of 3,000 copies.

In 1997 the leading circulation belonged to weekly *TVR-Panorama* with 65,000 copies. It was followed by the weeklies *Petrozavodsk* 38,000 copies and *Guberniya* 33,000. *Severnnyi Kurier* had dropped to 16,000, but it was still the only daily (coming out five days a week). The circulations of the other newspapers, such as *Molodezhnaya gazeta Karelii*, *Nablyudatel* and the new government organ *Kareliya*, were less than 6,000. The minority newspapers played only a minor role: the Finnish *Karjalan Sanomat* was printed in 2,000 copies twice a week and the Karelian weekly *Oma Mua* in 1,000 copies. A common characteristic of the successful newspapers was that they were mostly sold at retail and only 15-30% of circulation was through subscriptions.

The economic crisis of 1998 did little harm to the Karelian press and it soon recovered. For example, in January 1999 *Severnnyi Kurier* started to publish a Sunday issue which was sold only at retail in Petrozavodsk and surrounding small towns. *Severnnyi Kurier* could also stabilise its print run to 14,000.

The Karelian press market has become more pluralistic and more competitive, but the daily newspaper is no longer the most successful sector of the press. A weekly more easily than a daily can be distributed through retail and by mail to remote areas (many villages get mail only twice a week). The daily could not compete with prices and its

content continued to cater mainly to an elite public with homogeneous political views. The apparent division of the press into “elite” and “popular” newspapers has not resulted in a typical popular and a typical elite press. The popular newspapers resemble their Western counterparts more than the elite papers do. *Severnyi Kurier* continues to support established political standpoints whereas *Nablyudatel* tries to follow more a non-partisan line. Most papers belong to popular press, which pays considerable attention to the political scene (although everyday life, social problem and the like are not defined as political issues in the Russian context).

The rise of weeklies has had a negative impact on the local press outside Petrozavodsk. Small local papers have suffered from administrative control and lack of resources (they attract very few advertisers) and weeklies can compete with them more easily than dailies can. Almost all local papers have lost the major part of their circulation. In some districts a new local papers (in one case a joint paper for several districts) was founded to counterbalance the newspaper controlled by the public administration.

Changing journalism in a changing society

The structure of the Karelian press has certainly changed, but perhaps an even more radical change has been in journalism. The rest of this chapter points out some of the changes that have occurred in the practice of journalism by the adapting of contemporary Western (Finnish, Swedish, American) ideas on the development of journalism to the Russian reality. Previous studies on changes in Soviet and Russian journalism (e.g. Murray 1994, Schillinger & Porter 1991) have concentrated mainly on journalists and structural changes in texts. There have been almost no

studies how journalism has constructed reality in different phases of its development.

The changes in Russian journalism are analysed using both quantitative and qualitative instruments. The quantitative study includes the geographical orientation of news reports, the quantity of different kinds of texts, and the main actors and topics studied; the qualitative study concerns the ways in which reality is constructed and how particular seasonal topics are presented. Also studied is how social problems are defined and constructed.

The present analysis is based on the work of Jean Chalaby (1996) Jan Ekecrantz and Tom Olsson (1994, and Ekecrantz 1997), Risto Kunelius (1996) and Michael Schudson (1978) concerning the development of journalism in the US, Britain, Sweden and Finland. Their ideas have served as guidelines for this analysis of the Russian press.

Schudson argued that the idea of impartial “objective” news was the social product of the democratisation of political, economic and social life in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The growth of the democratic market society opened up ways for the development of the news in the 1830s. Later, in the 1920s, when faith in democracy and the market was badly shaken, increasing doubts about the possibility to be “objective” prompted the growth of professionalism and “the ideal of objectivity” as a viable attitude and work method for achieving the ideal results (Schudson, 1978: 154-155).

Similarly, Ekecrantz and Olsson (1994) link the development of Swedish journalism with social development. They conclude that journalism has gradually come to occupy a central place as “initiator and organiser of the public dialogue. It appoints ‘leading’ experts. Journalists also play the role of experts themselves” (Ekecrantz, 1997: 410.) Even earlier, journalism had reported on or participated in the public discourse, but in the 1980s “media have incorporated what was formerly the more autonomous social and political communication in society, and they seem less interested in representing the discourses, more intent on controlling them, or even producing them” (Ekecrantz, 1997:

408; see also Ekecrantz & Olsson, 1994). The society that emerges in journalism has become more actively edited by journalists.

Kunelius (1996), who has studied the development of news narration and forms of “hard” news, points at the growing narrative independence and transparency of journalism in relation to news sources. According to Kunelius the result of this development is a “professional news form” in which the news defines the nature of communication and the sources are filtered through a certain mode of news reporting. The rules of news reporting give the reporter a certain competence in dealing with difficult issues, but this competence is restricted by the very discipline that produces it (Kunelius, 1996: 246). These conclusions are very similar to those drawn by Ekecrantz and Olsson.

Chalaby (1996) defines journalism as an Anglo-American invention in that American and British journalists invented the modern conception of news and proper journalistic discursive practices such as reporting and interviewing. Journalists in other countries imported and adapted the methods of Anglo-American journalism.

Chalaby also explains why it was more likely for journalism to develop in the US and Britain than in France. The cultural origins of Anglo-American journalism are based on the fact that “the press grew independently from the literary field” and was able to create practices that were purely journalistic. Political origins are based on the two-party system and majority consensus, whereas in France “the space of political positions was wider and the field of political possibilities more open”. Economic origins include the rapid development of the market for advertisements which generate revenue and secure a measure of political independence for the press. (Chalaby, 1996: 316-320).

The research on the development of journalism in Northern and Western Europe and the US gives us some idea of which elements of change were important elsewhere and what to look for in the Russian case. The analysis in this chapter is based on categories that the author has become familiar with through practical experience, mainly from Finnish journalism, and theoretical study

of British and American journalism. Although there has been a variety of journalistic styles even in these three countries, certain ideas on the making of journalism are more common and dominant than others, which makes it possible to speak about a “Western mainstream journalism” – it is this mainstream journalism with which the Russian reality is being compared here.

This analysis is based on the journalistic changes that occurred in the traditional regional newspaper *Leninskaya Pravda/Severnyi Kurier* during one week in the years 1985, 1989, 1993 and 1997. Each year has been analysed separately and the results summarised at the end. The choice of the week 10-16th September makes it possible to follow whatever changes occurred in the coverage of seasonal topics, which for the second week of September had to do with the harvesting and preparation for the coming winter. The comparison of journalism in every fourth year makes it possible to reveal differences and changes, but it is not possible to specify when exactly these changes occurred.

Table 3 gives an overview of the changes that took place in journalism over the four periods studied. The variables were chosen using Ekecrantz (1997) as a basis, and also by delineating certain aspects that emerged from the data.

1985: Soviet Journalism

In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev’s election to the post of secretary general of the CPSU marked the beginning of perestroika and glasnost and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In journalism the first signs of a more open criticism began to appear, but by and large journalism followed established Soviet practices; there had been similar campaigns of openness and criticism even before Gorbachev.

Many of the stories were written by persons who were not part of the newsroom staff. This was a typical characteristic of Soviet journalism, which emphasised the participation of “the people” in doing journalism. According to Soviet doctrine only

Table 3. Comparison of journalistic strategies in different years

	1985	1989	1993	1997
Leading type of newspapers	Communist partisan daily	Communist partisan daily	Apolitical weekly	Apolitical weekly
Secondary type of newspapers	Communist partisan semi-daily, 3 / week	Non-communist partisan, pluralist weekly	“Democratic” political daily	Semi-political weekly and “democratic” political daily
Main content in daily newspaper	Journalistic story	Journalistic	Journalistic	Journalistic
Secondary content	News agency material	Letters to the editor	Advertisements	TV-programming
Stories in the first page	Political articles, campaign stories, some problems stories	Political articles, problem stories, more news than before	News, feature	News, editorials,
Geographical focus	Local, national, international	Local, national	Local, increasingly mixed	Local, mixed
Type of events	Processes, cyclic events	Processes, discussion	Processes or unique news	Unique news, processes
Time	Cyclic, past and present	Present and future	Past and present	Present
Actors	Groups, institutions	Institutions, individuals, groups	Individuals, institutions, institutional representatives	Representatives of institutions, individuals
Communities	We and the others, little division in own society	We, increasingly opinion groups	Smaller, increased divisions in own society	Smaller, sometimes large like the nation
Journalism and the other institutions	Journalism gives space to other institutions	Journalism gives space to other institutions, but also criticises them	Supports and criticises other institutions	Provides the point of view of other institutions
Dominant events	Campaigns, processes, plans, production,	Discussions, campaigns, reforms, shortcomings,	Conferences, seminars, visits from/to other countries, crime	Opinion polls, crime, problems and solutions,
Social problems	Shortcomings in production and services	Shortcomings in services, lack of information	Everyday harms, street children,	Lack of resources in public services, mismanagement,
Effects of social problems	Harm to society	Harm to individuals	Harm to some individuals	Harm to everyone or to weak groups
Reasons for social problems	Lack of discipline, ill-will, decisions not implemented	Nothing works, it has always been like that	No visible reason, individuals themselves	Lack of resources,
Solutions for social problems	Effect decisions better, discipline, punish the guilty	Nothing to be done. Administrative measures.	Administration will solve them, nothing to be done.	Administration has started to or will solve them
Seasonal stories	Harvesting, forestry	Harvesting,	Harvesting, but less than before	Provision of coal for winter
Coverage of seasonal stories	Campaigns, positive and negative news	Campaigns, but also news sources (mostly negative)	News stories	Features, news stories

persons directly engaged in production could report objectively on the real state of affairs in any sector of the economy. Letters to the Editor and texts written by external authors took up a fifth of the space. Material from news agencies and various official sources (speeches, etc.) took up a third, and less than a third of the page space contained the journalists' own texts. The remaining page space (ca. 13%) contained miscellaneous items.

The ideologically most important texts were placed on the front page. The second page continued with the topics and themes presented on the front page. The third page was devoted to foreign news or culture and on Sundays to human interest stories. The last page contained cultural, sport and human interest stories, and on occasion foreign news and crime reports as well.

The most important topics were the economy and working life. The paper reported on the harvest and forestry (the forest workers' day was celebrated on September 15th). The most typical events reported in the Soviet press had to do with cyclic campaigns. The ongoing campaign in September 1985 concerned the end of the first-year plan, the harvest, the agricultural development program "Earth-90" and the housing constructing program "House-warming-85". Success stories were reported on, but also stories about problems and there were encouraging editorials under the banner "Theme of the day". A typical story included both successes and failures and its aim, which was openly stated at the end of the story, was usually to try to improve the economy: "A striking example of how we all should work". Because the campaigns had such a dominant role, much of the newspaper content could be planned in advance.

Although different official texts were ranked highly, they took up only 8.2% of the space. Gorbachev's speech on the development of agriculture was published in full. Gorbachev spoke mainly in the name of the "central committee" or "we", but occasionally he used the pronoun "I" as well, which was unusual for a secretary general.

The geographical orientation of the stories was mainly local (54% of the space), but there was also a strong emphasis on

national and international events. National events and events in other regions of the Soviet Union took up 17% of the space and international events another 17%. Only 4% of the space was devoted to stories that mixed geographical categories, usually Karelia and Russia. The main time orientation of the stories was the present, with little emphasis on the past or future – the future was the main time category in only 5% of the stories.

The most important regions covered in the foreign news were Asia, the Middle East and Western Europe. Problems of capitalism were reported on as well as ongoing conflicts. US and West German support to the Afghan guerrilla and the Danish and British refusal to participate in the “Star Wars” program were news items. The war between Iran and Iraq was reported on from both sides: the Iraqi version was told by the TASS correspondent in Baghdad and the Iranian version by the TASS correspondent in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Social problems were presented as issues that “affect us all”. Journalism was a participant in solving these problems and it looked for explanations and sought to encourage better performance. A typical problem story began with a description of the situation and the problem, then the person responsible was asked to explain the shortcomings, and this was then followed by a party decision that urged taking action of some kind. Irresponsibility or the lack of discipline was usually given as the main reason for the problem.

The cause of the problems was seldom sought on the structural level; rather, the guilty parties were always individuals or groups who were usually pointed out by name – the bus depot did not provide enough buses or the construction unit did not repair a sport hall properly. If only the party decisions had been carried out as intended, and if everyone worked responsibly, the problem would not have arisen. The “individualisation” of social problems did not encourage the search for solutions on a structural level. The social system itself was above criticism. But this practice may have aggravated the problems instead and had a demoralising effect on the structural level. The persons in

authority were aware of the real problems in implementing party policy, but could not admit to it in public.

The emphasis on “we” and on common interests was vital. Journalism reported on common issues that were familiar to the public. There was no need to put the event into context by presenting the background and other connections as is the case in the Western mainstream news journalism. Soviet journalism contextualised the story differently: the story began with a presentation of the situation, the “news” was reported only after making this presentation, and at the end certain “conclusions” were drawn. The narrative voice of the text summarised the meaning of the news, encouraged even better performance or urged the correction of the problem in accordance with the party line.

Many stories did not contain “news” as it is presented in contemporary North European mainstream journalism. For example, a story could report that a meeting had taken place but say nothing about its results, or the purpose of the story could be to remind readers about the start of the newspaper’s subscription campaign.

In narrative terms, the closest Soviet journalism came to the Western concept of news were the short foreign news stories. They related facts, cited sources and usually did not comment directly on events (but indirectly through the choice of words, for example by labeling a figure in the news an “imperialist” or a “freedom fighter”). The explanation may be that foreign news was foreign, it had little relationship to the everyday life of Soviet people. Foreign news was not “our” news, except when the Soviet Union participated in international events. Even then, expressions like “our representative” were rare.

Most of the other stories followed a different narrative strategy. They were either direct speeches by outsiders, who reported on production successes or commented on important topics of the day, or they were texts by journalists in which the writer’s voice was visible and where comments were mixed with facts. The external author could be a veteran in the field of pedagogy writing on child upbringing, a public prosecutor telling

about new laws, or the head of Petrozavodsk harbour writing about success in increasing production.

The professional news form had little place in Soviet journalism. Journalism was part of the ideological apparatus and neither could nor should define the situations on its own or use quoted statements solely to prove its own conclusions. Journalism need not disguise its role. Soviet journalism did not try to set itself over the events it reported on. The events were not “up there”, they were on the same level as journalism and the general public. The aim of the news report was not to remain on the sidelines, but to influence the shaping of reality. Also, there was no need to set journalism over its sources or to doubt the sources, as this would only discredit the news reports. In Soviet journalism the function of external contributors was not to discredit a story but to give it greater credibility (at least according to the Soviet doctrine that emphasised the participation of the people in journalism).

1989: Perestroika Journalism

In 1989 the perestroika and glasnost policies continued, and Gorbachev and the party were still firmly in power. This period was characterised by open discussion and the search for alternatives. The collapse of the political systems in Eastern Europe was about to occur and the turbulence was felt even in the Soviet provinces.

The outlook of the regional newspapers was still very much “Soviet”, but there were also differences. More stories were written by the newspapers’ own journalists and there was a sharp decline in the use of news agency material. The increase of space devoted to news reports by journalists (see Table 4, p. 126) came about partly because of the publication of long feature articles written by staff journalists.

Even more space was now given to the Letters to the Editor. Letters were important in Soviet journalism but the policy was generally to publish only extracts. In 1989 this policy was changed and letters began to be published in full and were now printed several times a week in a special column (such as Letters of Debate) or on a page reserved for discussion (such as the Discussion forum of *Leninskaya pravda*). The previous unanimity and conventionalism were gone and many of the letters now dealt with a range of social issues, such as the campaign against alcohol or the relations between different nationalities of the Soviet Union. There was a plurality of views and these were no longer presented as the only correct ones.

The practice of publishing the speeches of the secretary general continued. Gorbachev who used the first person pronoun only a few times in 1985, spoke in 1989 clearly with his own voice, although the traditional we-forms and statements in the name of the party were also in evidence. Divisions within the party were becoming apparent and Gorbachev could not say everything on a general level, but was obliged to point out that the opinions he expressed were his own. Compared with 1985, the paper had become more lively. Photographs were not merely free-standing illustrations (with only a short story or caption attached); some were also related in some way to the stories. In some cases, the photographs were published a day after the story appeared in the paper. Most likely the stories aimed for a publication deadline that the photograph production could not meet. The growing emphasis on entertainment was seen in stories like “Does the Abominable Snowman Really Exist” and in a special weekly page for the elderly.

The space devoted to production figures and achievements declined. The harvest was still reported on as a main event, but the stories had become shorter and the space given to this topic was only half of that in 1985. There was more criticism and reports of shortcomings and failures and fewer success stories. The stories were no longer balanced by a presentation of successes to compensate for the failures. Other than the yearly harvest, no mention was

made of special campaigns and production figures were given less coverage than in 1985.

The paper aimed to come closer to real life by introducing the post of “journalist on duty”, a person who answered phone calls during special hours and who tried to respond to the questions and worries of the newspaper’s readers in a column published twice a week.

In Soviet journalism Letters to the Editor dealt with social problems presented as problems affecting everybody. In 1989 the letters had changed: they were more personal, it was no longer necessary to link the personal with the general and commonplace. The paper also published more letters in full whereas before they were used as material for stories. The problem was defined, the persons responsible were named, but the solution was sought in relation to individual needs more than in the carrying out of party decisions. However, the public authorities were still expected to solve the problems. In Letters to the Editor or in phone calls referred to in the stories, citizens could protest against sugar shortages or inefficient public services in a new suburb.

The increasing interest for domestic affairs caused a decline in the space allotted to foreign news. The space of local (Karelian) stories increased only a little, from 54 to 60%, but the space for stories that referred to the Soviet Union in general or to other regions in the Soviet Union increased to 25%. In addition, 7% of the space (compared with 3.5% in 1985) connected Karelia and the Soviet Union in general. The foreign stories took up only 7% of the space and of this amount the stories that did not refer to the Soviet Union or Karelia dropped from two-thirds to one-third.

A proper foreign news section could be found only twice in the six issues of the week under study. The foreign news told mainly about conflicts in third-world countries (Namibia, Angola, Nicaragua, Salvador). Examples of stories that connected local events with international events were the report on the visit of a party delegation from East Germany and a visit by a French theatre troop in Petrozavodsk. There was also a large combined story based on material published in *The Duluth News-Tribune* (USA),

in which the readers were informed about the salaries of celebrities in the USA, kangaroos in Duluth zoo and a senior citizens' marathon race.

Stories about social problems had also changed. The problems were closer to everyday life: sugar and milk shortages, improper control of the amount of nitrates in vegetables, the lack of petrol, problems with the harvesting and the scarcity of shops in a new suburb. It was no longer necessary to present the positive side along with the negative. A news story could report that the helpers who should be working with the harvest had not turned up at the camps or that there was no guarantee that the vegetables sold in the market did not contain an excess of nitrite.

A typical problem story of 1989 concerned the sugar shortages in the city. There was not enough sugar in the shops to meet the rationing cards quota, shops and the people were angry at having to go from shop to shop to find sugar. The journalist investigating the situation found that the sugar factory had intended to publish the timetable for distributing the sugar, but that the shops had refused to post the timetable because the sugar transport was a day late. The journalist concluded the story with the words: "So, a decision has been reached but not carried out. This means that besides the lack of sugar and information, the conscientiousness of the persons responsible in a previous stage is lacking. Who benefits from this state of affairs?"

As in 1985 the reason was the lack of discipline, but the solution could no longer be found in a better implementation of the decisions and punishment for the persons responsible. Indeed, no solution was proposed at all. If journalism in 1985 was disruptive at the structural level, in 1989 it was openly demoralising: everything went on as before, there were no solutions.

The reader was no longer a journalistic object to whom the Party spoke, but a consumer on whose behalf journalists opposed the authorities, thereby encouraging the public's distrust of the authorities and society in general and giving greater legitimacy to expressions of discontent. The increasing discussions about right and wrong answers added fuel to this state of affairs. The society

was destroying the old truths and constructing some new ones.

The narrative strategies had also begun to change. In many stories the narrative voice of the text was less visible than before and conclusions and points of view were not expressed as openly as before. The typical Soviet style of storytelling was still dominant: a story started with a description of the situation and of the background and only after that were the changes and results presented chronologically.

1993: journalism in search for a new role

In September 1993 almost two years had passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The collapse was followed by an economic crisis, the decline of industrial production and the beginning of economic reconstruction. The political conflict between the president and parliament was aggravated in November 1993 when the parliament was disbanded by force. At the same time, the press structure had changed dramatically. In Karelia *Severnii Kurier* was no longer the leading newspaper and its circulation had dropped to 31,000. It had also changed its status from a communist organ to an independent, journalist-owned newspaper and its political orientation shifted from communist to “democratic” (e.g. it supported pro-Yeltsin and pro-market reform ideas and opposed the communists and nationalists).

The most striking change in the appearance of the newspaper was advertising (see Table 4). Advertisements took up 22% of the space; 85% were commercial ads and 15% small classified ads. The most important advertisers were car shops and money-lending enterprises. Advertisements were usually placed on the third page and the back page.

The front page, which before was often devoted to ideologically important stories, in 1993 was more news-oriented. A large

Table 4. Use of space in *Leninskaya pravda* / *Severnyi Kurier* (%)

	1985	1989	1993	1997
Journalistic material	75,2	69,6	61,4	63,4
of which written by journalists	31,4	42,6	39,3	50,2
written by outside writer	16,1	15,9	8,1	3,2
from news agencies and other newspapers	27,7	11,1	14,0	10,0
Letters to the editor	3,4	14,3	3,3	5,1
Official material (speeches, laws etc.)	8,2	2,9	--	2,1
TV-program, weather etc.	5,3	5,4	8,3	14,1
Advertisement	3,2	3,0	22,2	9,9
Other (nameplate, etc.)	4,8	4,8	4,8	5,4

part of the front page was devoted to short news items. The amount of text written by journalists had grown and external writers were less in evidence. When an external author was allowed to publish a story, the topic was usually one requiring special knowledge or authority. Furthermore, some documents were published in full, such as the letter by the Association of Karelian Artists protesting against the murders of artists.

The number of Letters to the Editor had declined significantly. The letters dealt mostly with the everyday affairs of individuals, personal war memories, stories about old people, conferences etc. Earlier many of these would have been published as news stories written by non-staff writers. The number of complaint letters had also declined. The letters were published mainly in the Saturday issue under column “From the mail of the week: Our contemporary life”. The only public discussion was about the new constitution of Karelia.

Many of the news stories were based on letters or phone calls from readers. Journalists were asked to investigate why there was no bathwater in the Kukkovka district or what was going on in Karelian television. Journalism had lost its status as a public dis-

cussion forum, but it had preserved its role as public investigator and the place for explanations or for lodging complaints.

In Soviet journalism the geographic orientation was almost always limited to one region at a time. In 1993 an increasing number of stories mixed geographical categories: stories linked Russian events with Karelian and Karelian with foreign countries. This had occurred very seldom in 1985. The amount of space devoted to foreign news had grown from 7 to 20%, mainly because of Karelia/Russia's increased co-operation with foreign countries. *Severnyi Kurier* published only 20 foreign news items, which it had received from the RIA news agency. Many of these items concerned the CIS-countries or events in which Russia had a role, such as the processing of the support project for Russia in the US Congress. The other regions of Russia also received more attention than before; there were reports on the price of petrol in Moscow, militia maneuvers in Vladivostok and the refusal of the local authorities to register a Cossack organisation in Khabarovsk.

The traditional autumn campaign in connection with the harvest was still given coverage, but the emphasis had changed from a campaign to a newsworthy event. The paper reported on attacks by local youth on students who were helping with the harvest and broadened the story by interviewing an official of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The share of the representatives of various institutions among the actors mentioned in the news stories had grown from 17 to 24%, whereas the share of various collective groups had fallen. An important indicator of an increased variety in coverage was the rise in the number of women among the actors from 17% in 1985 and to 27% in 1993.

There no longer seemed to be any social problems that harm the whole society, as was the case previously. The Letters to the Editor concerned individual problems that were not presented as being harmful to society as a whole. The problems harmed only the individuals in question, such as the difficulty to obtain a visa to travel abroad and the negligence of the travel organiser.

Problem stories written by journalists concerned such problems as the water

shortage problem in the Kukkovka district (in Petrozavodsk) and the fate of a street-child who had visited the newsroom. The story about the Kukkovka water problem reported as news – what had happened and why, and what was being done about it. There was no search for the guilty party (or query as to why the people had not been informed about the repair works that had caused the brake in the water main). The story emphasised the active role of the press in investigating the story (the initiative came from individual citizens who called the newspaper), but also supported the official standpoint of the authorities.

Another story about social problem presented to the readers a street-child who had turned up in the newsroom. The story in interview form concluded with a comment by the reporter: “I do not want to comment on this simple but awful story. I do not know how much is the truth and how much is a lie, or if it is a pitiful tale and that lending a helping hand would not be amiss. Some readers might find it an interesting little story to read with their morning coffee, a story about a fairheaded boy named Tolya Prokhorov who would like to be a driver but who is unlikely to ever become one.”

It was not considered necessary to moralise or consider what should be done. The story told the readers about the life of a street-child as an interesting phenomenon. The function of journalism was not to solve the problem, but to tell about how other people live. In Soviet journalism this kind of distancing and non-commenting journalism would not have been possible, but corresponds well with Western mainstream or popular journalism.

Many of the stories had come closer to the ideal of the invisible and independent role of the own voice of the text. The own voice was recognisable in many stories but seldom commented on them, emphasising instead the actions of the journalist. There were also other examples where the own voice of the text was made visible; for example: “We have already begun to drop the idea that the Karelian capital has become a place where most of the prestigious international happenings are arranged” or “As we have already reported...”, a phrase at the beginning of a story about a conference. The

use of “we”, however, no longer divided the world into “us” and “them”, but was used as a narrative strategy to create a sense of communality between the journalist and the readers or in reference to the newspaper itself.

However, the newspaper tried to be a participant in social processes instead of being merely a neutral observer. For example, a news story about an initiative to choose the city dweller of the year emphasised the role of the newspaper in looking for this person: “*SK* is ready to support the initiative of the city authorities and offers its pages for a discussion of the candidates”.

1997: a mixture of the old and the new

By 1997 *Severnnyi Kurier* was no longer the leading newspaper of Karelia, although it was still the only daily paper. The non-political weeklies, which had competed with *SK* on an equal basis in 1993 had taken the lead in 1997. Journalists had taken control of over 50% of the page space of the newspaper (compared with 30% in 1985), and the major share of the remaining space was covered by advertisements, television programming information and similar non-journalistic items.

The growing importance of television was visible even in *Severnnyi Kurier*. Compared with the three channels in 1985 and 1989 and the five channels in 1993, the paper in 1997 now published the program schedule for 11 channels. The weekly television programming took up two pages in the Saturday issue (eight pages in all for the week).

The growing share of material produced by journalists indicates that Russian journalism is approaching a journalist-controlled professionalism. However, some of the recent changes seem to suggest a return to former practices. Certain press releases and official texts were published in full, which did not occur in 1993. This could be explained partly by the reorganisation of the

press services, which had started to provide material that could be published in full, and partly by closer links journalism now had with administrative sources. There was also increasing political agitation in addition to the news narrative, which indicates both the continuing political role of *Severnnyi Kurier* and the intensifying of political confrontation.

The typical news of the week no longer concerned the seasonal campaigns at harvest time. There was only one news item concerning the potato harvest. In place of the harvest, a new seasonal story had appeared: the heating of apartments in winter. This switch gives an idea of a society in process of change: agriculture, which used to be a commonplace campaign topic, had become the private business of individual farmers and companies, but the sufficient supply of heating material, which had been taken for granted before, was now a major issue of public importance which the newspapers covered. However, the coverage was no longer in the form of a campaign; rather, the preparations for winter were reported as a feature in which some we-forms were used; however, the responsibility for making adequate preparations was not on “us all” but on the city authorities which, according to the newspaper, were doing a good job. “We” referred also to the newspaper, whose role in reporting the preparations was emphasised.

The journalism of 1997 presented a mixture of new and old practices. For example, *Severnnyi Kurier* published lists of enterprises that had not paid their contribution to the pension fund, giving the names of the directors, but it did not condemn the practice as was the case under Soviet journalism. The use of whole names was becoming more frequent (the Soviet practice was to use only surname and the first-name initials). Already over a third of the stories gave the whole first name of the author, which was very unusual even in 1993 (only 2% of the stories gave the author’s name). The use of the whole first name became more common in news texts as well.

The mixture of popular and high culture (a common phenomenon in contemporary Russian culture) was clearly visible in

Severnnyi Kurier. The paper published a weekly horoscope, entertainment news and criminal chronicles and its Letters to the Editor often had high emotional content. In addition, over 12% of the stories related to human interest topics, such as animals, celebrities or curious points of history.

The share of stories relating to Karelia had grown somewhat with the decline of Russian stories. The share of foreign news remained at 20%. In general, the use of geographic categories changed hardly at all. *Severnnyi Kurier* had switched news agencies from the state-owned RIA to private Interfax, which did not provide news from outside the former Soviet Union, and its foreign news was either related to Russia or taken from other sources. *Severnnyi Kurier* also published a special section with entertainment news, including reports on Arnold Schwarzenegger buying a new car and on Robert Redford's 60th birthday. There was also an article on long-lived persons that had been translated from *Newsweek*.

In 1997 the most important group among the actors figuring in the news stories were representatives of various institutions, whereas references to non-affiliated persons decreased. The society of *Severnnyi Kurier*, for example, was now referred to in the news more often by its individual representatives than by its own name. Compared with 1985 the share of institutional representatives mentioned in the news almost doubled from 17% to 30%, whereas references to the institutions by name alone decreased. During the same period, the share of women among the actors in news reports had fallen to 19%, nearly the same level as in 1985. These changes may be an indication of both the growing dependency of journalism on official sources and the growing personalisation of the institutions.

There were more Letters to the Editor in 1997 than in 1993. During the sampled week *Severnnyi Kurier* published 18 letters compared with 10 in 1993. Letters were published in special columns under the headings "Letters to SK", "Letters about the Powerholders" and "Conflicting Opinions". The letters were not complaints, which had usually been the case before, but speech

acts in a public discussion. The authors commented on the monetary reform, asked where to study the Karelian or Finnish language, demanded changes in the leadership of Karelia and praised the mayor of Petrozavodsk. In the Soviet Union the press had compensated for the lack of a civil society, and it filled the same function in 1997: if a citizen found a dog left behind at a bus stop, he or she wrote about it in a letter to the editor.

Many letters commented on stories that had been published in the newspaper. A reader wrote that his words had been misinterpreted when his previous letter had been edited. Some of the letters were also about events that had not received coverage elsewhere, such as the letter by the director of the Onega tractor factory museum on the work of the museum or on the sightseeing visit by Karelian invalids to Finland.

The items published under the headline “Conflicting opinions” debated the question of prepaid university education: one writer opposed the education institutions’ monopoly and another commented that prepaid education was not part of market economy that the majority had already chosen. The rector’s defence of the new system was recorded in an interview by a journalist although it was published in the discussion section of the newspaper.

A new link between the newspaper and the readers was forged by means of instant opinion polls in which a few citizens were interviewed on the street (or other public place) about a wide range of topics, everything from what characteristics should a future president of Russia have and what did they think about a recent monetary reform to how they spent their summer vacation.

Some of the news stories dealt with social problems, pointing out the lack of resources and giving examples of mismanagement, but also emphasising the positive role of the administration in solving the problems. An example is the article about school lunches published under the headline “Nice food, tasty food”, which reported that all the children at a particular school received a free lunch although the school lacked sufficient funds for that purpose. The story also revealed that the suppliers

charged exorbitant prices and delivered products of poor quality; it was also disclosed that the administration would declare an open competition among producers if the current suppliers continued with these base practices.

The story made little effort to make common cause with the readers, rather it presented facts about the administration. The own voice of the news was less visible than before; problems were explained in common-sense terms (“It is clear that...”), but did not challenge the administration’s point of view. The own voice of the story did not comment on the situation (except through the ironically worded headline). The focus was not on a guilty person or institution unless by guilty party was meant the producers who supplied the schools or the administration that tolerated their poor performance.

In narrative terms, the own voice of the stories was usually both invisible and independent (apparent to some extent in 40% of stories compared with 16% in 1985 and 37% in 1993), but there were few direct quotes. Some stories were full of facts but the sources of the facts were not mentioned at all. Nevertheless, many of the stories filled the requirements of “professional news narration” (which according to Kunelius, writing in 1996, are stories that include brief quotes from the sources in transparent and independent narration of the voice that is telling the news) to a greater extent than before, and journalism was steadily adapting this mode of reporting the news.

The rhetorical “us”-mode was applied in commentaries and editorials such as “Of what can we be proud?” (headline) and in news articles such as “Meeting with our own and Finnish businessmen” (news item). A further indication of the changes taking place was that “we” referred more and more often to a smaller group, such as the people who had lived in Leningrad during the siege or the workers of a single company.

Conclusions

The Soviet press was traditionally political and administration-oriented. Its task was to influence the public and support various campaigns. Critical coverage of campaigns and the actions of the public authorities was not encouraged. Soviet journalism was engaged in constructing a society that overtly emphasised collective and common values, but privatised the reasons for social problems. On the one hand, it gave a voice to the people, but on the other it set the limits for this voice. It could be said that journalism's role, whether assigned or assumed, was dysfunctional because it promoted the process of social disintegration that others had initiated.

Russian journalism is currently moving in the same direction that Western journalism has been moving for the last 150 years. However, the process of development has not followed a straight line, nor has it been one-dimensional, which is apparent even within the short time period covered by this analysis.

Among the major changes in Russian journalism is the growing control of the text by the journalists themselves. Journalists have also begun to quote other sources in presenting "the facts", but ensure at the same time that it is they who decide the context. Russian journalism is no longer focused on agitation and campaigns in which the people should participate. The other side of the coin is that this kind of journalism does not offer readers the possibility to question the reality being presented. Journalism tells some interesting stories and displays the world to the audience, but the public is seldom invited to participate in or to have second thoughts about what the newspaper is reporting on.

The use of official information and non-staff writers tells us a lot about the power structures surrounding Russian journalism. What is important is not whether this information is true or not, but that "the real state of affairs" is reported on by an official writing the article under his or her own name and not by an investigative journalist. In Western mainstream news journalism,

outside information is either “specialist knowledge” or “opinions” framed by journalistic interpretation. In Western journalism if a fact (especially a statistic) is cited in a direct quote, it might even have less credibility with the readers than if it was presented as a “fact” by the own voice of the news. In Soviet journalism the use of official sources and external writers gave, on the contrary, more credibility (at least from an official point of view), and this may have preserved to some extent even in contemporary Russian journalism.

The division between quality newspapers and the popular press is a long-standing feature of Western journalism. Something like this division has begun to appear in the Russian press (see e.g. Lange 1997: 190), but it is not the division between *quality* in the sense of balanced, sophisticated, unemotional reporting and *popular* in the sense of entertaining, populist, partisan, emotional reporting. The popular newspapers are more like their Western counterparts than are the “quality newspapers” which, at least in Karelia, tend to mix popular features with quality features. The latter are sometimes openly partisan and, to some extent, continue to fill the role as a forum for public discourse: they declare their ties with the public, pay considerable attention to the Letters to the Editor and try to advise readers. This strategy has not been very successful, however, considering that the circulations of the old-style newspapers have declined and the new, more entertaining and apolitical newspapers have attracted a new set of readers.

The new press has largely rejected journalism’s traditional role and has openly declared its indifference to politics. If the traditional journalism of the Soviet era was concerned mainly with political agitation and propaganda, the pressure of the market has now added a new element to contemporary journalism – apolitisation – which has proved to be a successful option after the highly political press of the perestroika. It would perhaps not be a mistake to conclude that the real competition has not yet started and there is (as yet) no market for objective, unbiased political news.

How many forms of journalism are there in Russia today? Old-style, administrative-political journalism is dying out, but it

has left its mark on current journalism. A new political, civil-society oriented but partisan approach is sometimes visible in the journalistic style of *Severnyi Kurier*: a voice is given to the public, but no real effort is made to activate marginalised groups. There are also signs of a new informative and neutral treatment of the news, although the current mainstream approach seems to be apolitical journalism. These forms of journalism overlap between newspapers. In the long-established newspapers there is much more of the old-style journalism; in the new generation of newspapers the new forms of journalism have a much stronger position.

The notion of a dispersion of journalistic practices (Chalaby 1996) is partly verified in that *Karjalan Sanomat* has begun to imitate the Western press much more rapidly than the Russian language newspapers have. This process has been accelerated by the continued internship of Finnish journalism students and the closer contacts journalists on this paper have with Finland.

It could be asked why Western-type “professional” news journalism has had difficulty making headway in Russia. One reason, of course, is that the old-style journalists need time to adapt to the new conditions. Another reason has to do with the surrounding society. First, professional news journalism seems to presuppose widely accepted common values, which gives journalism the possibility to speak in the name of us all. Actually, in reality these “common values” may have been constructed by journalism or by the hegemonic ideology of the society. Nevertheless, when a society is divided (not fragmented, as are Western societies) and when there is no broad consensus on the basic issues in society, all issues become politicised and the distinction between facts (things we agree about) and opinions (things we disagree about) becomes less apparent.

Second, a professional news journalism that put the sources and actors in “proper context” emerged when the sources (politicians, specialists) lost their authority to speak directly to the public and to define the frame within which reality is presented. In Russia the politicians and other external sources still have the power to define the reality conveyed through journalism. Journalism nei-

ther casts doubt on nor interprets the politicians and the political alternatives are very much present, at least at the level of discourse.

The drop in circulation and the general public's rejection of political journalism may indicate that the readers are dissatisfied with a form of journalism that presents the audience with its own ready-made conclusions and that serves more as a public discussion forum than a source of news. Opinions polls regarding attitudes towards journalism had the following outcome: in December 1997, 71% of the citizens believed that the main task of the media is "to provide information about events and current affairs in the country and the world". Only 27% of the persons polled chose the alternative "to express public opinion and the mood of the people". A mere 10% believed that the media should serve as a forum for agitation and to form a political position (the persons interviewed gave an average of two answers) (*Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie* 1997).

Is it likely that Russian journalism will develop in the same direction as Western journalism has? The factors behind the development of Western journalism – capitalism and market relations, the lack of political alternatives, the pressure of market forces and the increasing role of consumerism – are Western phenomena that will probably shape the development of Russian society as well. If journalism assumes the same role in Russia as it has in Western Europe and Northern America – i.e., as the mediator and creator of a common ground in a highly dispersed society – then its development will in many respects follow the Western models.

But there are other possibilities as well. The role of television as the main source of news could restrict the development of newspapers (although this is not likely without highly local television programming, in which case newspapers could continue to serve as primarily political organs or as sources of entertainment). Or journalism could remain dependent on narrow political and economic interests, giving a different kind of journalism and a different place for journalism in society.

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