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Research in Regional Press

REGPRESS

Preliminary content analysis

*The structure and content of dominant papers in
Mid-Southern Sweden*

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Introduction

In this report, on behalf of the REGPRESS project, I will give a preliminary outline of the structure and content of the dominant daily (printed) papers in the regions of Blekinge, Småland and the West coast (area around Borås). The titles of interest (i.e. the main papers of each region), as identified earlier in the project, are Blekinge Läns Tidning (Blekinge), Barometern OT and Smålandsposten (Kalmar and Västervik) respectively) and Borås tidning (West coast).

The aim of this endeavour is not to attempt to answer any of the research questions posed in the REGPRESS project but merely to provide a base for discussion about ways to further problematize or operationalize different aspects of the printed newspapers' content in relation to the questions of the project. Indeed, in order to be able to answer questions about the role and value of regional media in a global media age it is fundamental to get in touch with and try to grasp the architecture and material of the aforementioned media. To that end, all of the following questions (as posed in the project description) may draw upon the findings in this report in the process of problematizing or operationalizing relevant concepts regarding newspaper content for further inquiry:

- How do regional press organizations connect at the regional level?
- How do printed press and digital press act at the regional level?
- What is the importance and relevance of the connection fostered between regional press and local communities in the civic sphere?
- What is the influence of regional press on local democratic processes and in citizen participation in the public sphere?

Newspaper content, it should be noted, is a fairly abstract concept and could as such be delimited, problematized and examined in a number of ways. Without any theory guiding the analysis however the initial definition of the concept has to be fairly broad. What, then, are the significant elements of newspaper content, or rather, what is a newspaper? According to the Oxford dictionary a newspaper is “A printed publication (usually issued daily or weekly) consisting of folded unstapled sheets and containing news, articles, advertisements, and correspondence” (oxforddictionaries.com). The

definition is rather straightforward; newspaper content could be described in terms of news, articles, advertisements and correspondence. To simply go ahead and analyse the structure or instances of these elements in a newspaper could nonetheless be problematic given that news are often presented in the form of articles, meaning there is an overlap of concepts in the definition. Moreover, the definition is rather shallow and, it might be argued, wanting in terms of specificity. A more pragmatic and nuanced definition, grounded in the empirical context of the project, would likely be achieved by analysing the content in terms of the different *sections* that constitute the newspapers.

Another way of looking at content would be through numbers. The amount of space given to a certain type of content, for example, might say something about its importance in the view of the newspaper.

In order to account for the newspapers' structure and content the following questions will guide the analysis:

- What sections are featured in the papers and how are they structured?
- What is the amount of space given to the different sections in the papers?
- What is the structure of the different sections in the papers?

1 Method

The method used was mainly one of categorizing, measuring and counting, although some preliminary work of identification of proper material as well as a unit of measurement for the quantification of different types of content had to be made.

2 Sample of newspapers

As part of the REGPRESS project the dominant newspapers from the three regions under investigation were considered for the preliminary content analysis. Due to newspaper logic and newspaper discourse, where newspapers like most other commercial media are usually highly repetitive in terms of structure, one might speculate that accounts of a newspaper's structure and content could sufficiently be made after analysing any one issue of a paper. However, the repetitive nature of the daily newspaper discourse is primarily on a weekly (or even yearly) rather than on a daily basis, i.e. the structure may well differ along the days of a week. So, for example,

Mondays are usually considered slow newsdays whereas the Saturday issue of a daily paper, due to the lack of Sunday issues, is often significantly more voluminous than the other issues. Following that logic, a comprehensive picture of the newspaper content could preferably be attained through the analysis of a full (news)week's output, whereas considerations of the position of the specific week along a calendar year would be of less relevance. In this stage of the project, however, a smaller sample (only three issues) of papers from each of the newspaper titles were selected for analysis whereas three out of six days of the newsweek had to be excluded. Guided by some more or less grounded assumptions about the "rhythm of the week" then, where the beginning of the week and the weekend were assumed to possibly diverge in some regard from the days in between, the Monday, Wednesday and Saturday issues of all titles under consideration during one week in December 2015 were selected for analysis. The issues selected were published on the 7th, 10th and 12th of December 2015.

3 Approaching the texts

The content of the newspapers, as declared in the introduction of this report, was identified and classified according to the different sections that would appear in the newspaper. The identification of different sections were primarily done with the help of section headlines whereas unclassified advertisement content were identified through the recognition of basic metalingual codes of advertising as they would appear in the content.

The decision of how to measure the amount of space given to each of the sections on the other hand was somewhat less straightforward. Considering the paginated organisation of the newspaper content it seemed appropriate to use a newspaper page as the unit of measurement. After skimming through the papers it became clear that the papers would in large part dedicate a full number of pages to each section, making (in theory) a page the unit of measurement rather purposeful. However, due to the fact that there were advertisements of varying sizes embedded throughout the news content, the number of pages dedicated to a section (in reality) had to be an estimation of the amount of space given to a certain category. Nevertheless, with some advertisements covering full pages and other ones more or less gridded on the pages, it was quite possible to discern the editorial/advertising-ratio of a section within a reasonable margin of error. The

reliability of measurement, hence, with regard to the purpose of the analysis, was considered fairly reasonable.

4 Findings

In the following I will present an outline of the structure and content of Barometern, Borås tidning (BT), Blekinge Läns Tidning (BLT) and Smålandsposten (SMP). First, I will provide an overview of the overall structure and content of the papers. After that I will give a somewhat more detailed account of the structure and content of the different sections.

5 Types of content and overall structure

All issues of all four titles consist of two main sections although some issues features additional sections with leisure and lifestyle-oriented content as well as additional advertising content as the common denominator. The Saturday issue of Barometern for example, includes a third section (16 pages) called Bonus weekend whereas BLT, on the same day, sports an extra 32 pages in an appendix called Christmas in Blekinge. The Saturday issue of SMP, in turn, features two additional sections: one with a home/garden theme and one with a Saturday leisure theme (total of 22 pages), while the Monday issue of BT, finally, appends an additional 24 pages of “advertorial” material from a supermarket consortium. Interesting as it is to note the presence of these additional sections I will not analyse them any further. Instead, I will focus on the two main sections that appear to be the fundament of every newspaper.

In the first two sections of all papers investigated, besides the first (index) page, there seems to be a number of recurring sub sections, as denoted by section headings in the papers. Although the order of some of the sections varies among the titles and/or issues, a few sections (italicized) are consistently presented in the same relative order: Political *leader*, news about *main town*, the surrounding *region*¹, *Sweden*, the *World*, Opinion/Debate, Culture/Entertainment, Sports, Personal/Family pages (including birth, marriage and death listings), Classifieds, Fun and games (e.g. comic strips, quizzes), Radio and TV tableau as well as weather. Also worth noting, at this level of analysis, might be the total number of pages for each title and issue where Barometern, BT and

¹ Several subsections of smaller towns or areas surrounding the newspapers' main towns were clustered together in a category called “Region”.

SMP has approximately the same number of pages per issue while BLT has significantly more pages. Please refer to the table in Appendix 1 to get a sense of the amount of space given to the full papers as well as the approximate amount of pages given to each section in the papers.

6 Structure and content of sections

Against this backdrop of the overall structure and content of the papers I will now give a brief description of the structure and content of the different sections that constitute the papers. Some sections will be clustered together when appropriate. All the indexed sections of the papers are introduced with a section header together with editorial staff credits as well as contact information for that specific section. In many cases there are also an e-mail address and a phone number specifically for readers' news tips. In addition to that, in Barometern for example, the personal/family pages as well as the opinion/debate pages are introduced with a "Good morning!" and a short comment by a (photographed) member of the editorial staff. Other elements that are usually present at the beginning of an indexed section are web addresses to the online edition where, it is announced, the latest news as well as Web-TV content can be found for viewing. In some instances there are also lists featuring the most read news items of the web edition.

7 First pages

Every paper has one or two "first" pages within the main sections. Barometern has one in the beginning, covering both sections, while the others have a first page for each section. On a first page certain articles, often through quotes or pictures, are highlighted from different subsections of the paper. There is also a regular page index near the bottom as well as an occasional advertisement covering up to a quarter of the page.

8 Leader, opinion and debate

Every paper, after the first page begins with one or a couple of leading articles (one page) from the leading columnist, the political editor-in-chief and/or a guest writer. The leader of the Saturday edition of Barometern also features a segment called "The letter" with an accompanying reply. When it comes to the leader BLT stands out from the crowd in featuring a small text declaring the newspaper's political mission and ideological foundation. Besides the leader all papers and issues (except for BT's

Saturday issue which has none) provide an additional section for debate, where anyone from the fellow citizen to local politicians or industry representatives can voice their opinion (according to certain by-laws provided in all the newspapers).

9 Community news

The sections of the main towns: Borås, Kalmar, Karlskrona and Växjö as well as the larger region contain a variety of notices and articles as well as occasional public announcements from municipality offices. Usually news about the main town comes first and the rest of the region follows. BLT however features a significantly higher proportion of regional news as well as begins and ends with county news, placing instead the news about Karlskrona and its surrounding towns in between the community news content.

Besides the local or regional news all papers provide some national and international news and as opposed to the local or regional news almost all content under these categories, in all papers, are acquired from a news bureau, mainly TT Nyhetsbyrån.

10 Culture, entertainment and sports

Together these sections amount for a large portion of the newspaper content although sport is clearly the more prominent of the two. Throughout the titles the culture and entertainment section, providing everything from articles to ratings and reviews of cultural artefacts like concerts or books, feature selfmade as well as bought (TT) or freely available (listings, etc.) content. The same goes for sports even though the sports section, which features articles as well as calendars, game scores, and betting guides, overall seems more locally anchored and thus offer a somewhat larger proportion of self made articles. As with the community news, the content in the sports section typically moves from regional to national or international matters.

11 Personal/Family

Along with the BMD (birth, marriage, death) announcements this section typically offers one or two articles, often portraits of local profiles, and a few notices with the people of the region at its focus. BLT, as the exclusion, did not provide this section in its Monday issue.

12 Fun & Games, Stock market, TV & Radio and Weather

These sections were basically the same across the board even though they were given different amounts of space among different newspapers and issues. The TV & Radio listings seem to be bought as a complete package from TT Nyhetsbyrån whereas the weather is provided by the Swedish meteorological and hydrological institute (SMHI).

13 Miscellaneous content

Besides the regular segments that are featured in all the titles some content only appears in certain titles and/or issues. BLT, BT and SMP for example, in addition to the regular economy (stock market) listings, feature one to two pages of industry news in at least one edition. Barometern and SMP, moreover, include (on the reverse of each paper), an additional news column with its commentary on some arbitrary current matter. While Barometern features a local entrepreneur in one case and columnists from TT in the other two cases, SMP features its own list of columnists according to a (seemingly recurring) weekly (mon-fri) schedule.

Additional examples of miscellaneous content, unique to certain papers or issues are found in BT's Saturday specific section "Tema" which includes testing of consumer goods, a photocopy of a 50 year old newspaper page from the archives and some fun and games; BLT's Wednesday specific "Find the flow" and Saturday specific "Book and film" with their focus on lifestyle and entertainment as well as in Barometern's Wednesday issue featuring a Motor section. Like in the sections or appendices that were mentioned in the beginning of this chapter the common denominator for these sections would be lifestyle and entertainment.

There is also a variety of miscellaneous content where the newspapers in some issues of some titles allow for some kind of interaction with the readership, like for example drawing or photo contests and their results. SMP for instance, in its section "Santa", encourages its readers to have their children drawing pictures of Santa to have them published in the paper. Another form of interaction can be seen in lotteries, votings and encouragements to enter readership panels where it is possible to voice one's opinion about the newspaper.

In a full page letter to the readers, finally, which possibly could have been coded as an advertisement instead, the readership editor of BLT with his photograph and some graphics of a pencil with wings (covering two thirds of the page) talks about the importance of freedom of speech and encourages the readers to participate in public debate by sending letters to the paper.

14 Advertisements

Advertisements account for a large portion of a daily paper. Besides the classified advertisements, making up its own section of the newspaper, two types of unclassified or assorted advertisements (ranging from full page ads to smaller size ads more or less embedded in the editorial content) were identified in the papers. An advertisement can be placed in one or both of two broad categories.

1. Promotion of local businesses, products or services, including lunch guides or market guides (similar to the yellow pages, where a selection of local companies are promoted under various business categories) etc.
2. Promotion of the newspapers' own products or services (e.g. online news content, Web TV, advertising space, sponsored events).

15 Concluding thoughts

It is interesting to note that the four papers under investigation are quite similar in terms of structure and content (generically speaking). Even though they sometimes name their sections differently or change the order of certain sections, the general structure remains the same. This is not surprising due to institutionalising forces present in all sectors of industry and even less surprising due to the fact that all the papers are part of the same owner group, Gota Media. What changes however, between the different titles as well as the days of the week, or the days of the year for that matter, is the actual content. With the exception of perhaps some news bureau material and some of the highly redundant material (e.g. crosswords, TV-guides, etc.), the notices, calendars, news articles, the BMDs and even the classifieds are of course unique for the dominant paper of each region. At this level of analysis then, it is the structural arrangement of content, in and between the papers, that is interesting. Further analysis, guided by theory from the literature review, could be done on the content itself. Both qualitative and quantitative aspects of content should be of interest.

The purpose of this small piece of research was to sketch up a preliminary outline of the structure and content of the dominant daily (printed) papers in the regions of Blekinge, Småland and the West coast (area around Borås). I hope that this report may provide some of the groundwork for further problematizing or operationalizing different aspects of the printed newspapers' content in relation to the questions of the project.

16 Appendix 1

Title	BAR			BT			BLT			SMP		
	M	W	S	M	W	S	M	W	S	M	W	S
Index	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Leader	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Main City	6	7,5	6,75	4,5	5,25	6,5	2,25	3,5	3	3,5	4,25	4,5
Region	7,5	8,25	7,75	3	3	4	7,5	9,75	12,5	6,75	7,75	6,33
Sweden	1	1	0,33	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
World	1	1	2	1	1,75	1,5	1	1	1	1	1	1
Opinion/ Debate	1	2	2	1	2	-	1	1	3	1,5	1,66	1,25
Economy (Stock M)	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	2	1	1	1
Culture/ Entert.	3	3	3,66	2	6	6	2	2	2	4	3	3
Sports	10	7	7,75	5,75	6,5	10	10	5,5	7,75	10	5,75	7
Personal/ Family/	2	2	5	2	3	2,8	-	4	4	2	4	4,75
Classif.	1	3	9	2	1	6	2	3	11	2	4	10
Fun & Games	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	-
TV & Radio	3	2	4	3	3	3	2	2	4	3	3	5
Weather	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,66	0,66	0,66	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,66	0,66	0,66
Misc.	1,5	1,25	1,25	2	4	6	0,75	0,5	4	1,83	1,83	2
Ads (Assorted)	6,5	5,25	9,76	8,09	4,84	10,54	26	33,25	11,25	5,76	5,1	9,51
Pages (Total)	48	48	64	40	48	64	60	72	72	48	48	60

The table shows the number of pages devoted to different sections in Barometern, Borås Tidning, Blekinge läns tidning on the 7th, 10th and 12th of december 2015.

