

# „Media, civil society and press freedom in Germany“

**Sven Hansen**

Editor Asia-Desk

 **die tageszeitung**

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# 1. Legal Framework of German media/civil society

Constitution promises press freedom (Art. 5), freedom of assembly (Art. 8) & freedom of association (Art. 9). Constitutional court as highest court sometimes decides against the government

Laws promise free access to information (2005/2006)

Neither media nor associations need licences. Associations should register, but registration can only be rejected on formal grounds, not on political grounds (except for fascist groups)

Every person and organization can publish, but has to name a responsible and liable person (=V.i.S.d.P)

Civil associations, sport clubs, political parties, trade unions, church groups, business companies, citizen initiatives can publish leaflets/magazines/papers/brochures/websites on their own according to their own needs and rhythm

## 2. Basic features of German media & civil society

Europe's publication with the highest circulation (13,78 million) is the magazine of the German Automotive Club (ADAC, 18 mio members). ADAC and its *Motorworld* strongly influence traffic policies/regulation for cars.



Basic features of German media:

- high number of newspaper titles
- strong local focus of most papers/federal structure of public broadcasting system
- only small number of national papers
- high variety and numbers of magazines
- only few papers attached to political parties
- tradition of (small) alternative press sind 1970s
- high dependence on advertisement
- growing concentration/declining circulation of print media
- dual (public & private) system of broadcast media

### 3. Media development after World War II (1)

Censorship by the four allies in occupied Germany

Constitutions (1949) in East & West promise press freedom, but different practices with more space in the West

East: Centralisation under party control, building of monopoly (undermined by Western media, first through Berlin, after 1961 (Berlin Wall) only electronically)

Lack of paper as censorship tool, access to print & copy machines strictly controlled

West: Allies give licenses to persons not linked with fascism (Augstein, Springer), end of licensing system in 1949

Electronic media as public broadcaster in the regions (federalism), national TV-channel only after 1963

### 3. Media development after World War II (2)

West: Public broadcasting system funded by user fee (not by government/parliament) until today

In the boards of public broadcasters representation of civil society (Political parties, trade unions, churches, minority groups like handicapped). However stations in general are biased in favor of the regional governing party



Spiegel affair 1962/65: Courts strengthen media freedom by judging against government. Report on weapon systems no treason of military secrets

Media in general represent establishment, do not question political or social system (communist party ban until 1969)

Economic interests of publishers contradict press freedom

## 4. Developments in the 1970s (1)

New social movements (Student, environment, anti-nuke, women, peace) feel neglected by mainstream media. Local grass-root media come up, mostly local socio-(sub-)cultural magazines (*Zitty* since 1977, *Pflasterstrand*, *Stadtrevue*, *Plärrer*), but also a few independent or even pirate radio-stations (*Radio Dreyeckland* 1977).

Leftwing activists form activist paper/media services provide views from below and voices from the movements (*Volksblätter*).

Partly more flyers than journalistic articles

1973-1981 *ID: Informationsdienst für die Verbreitung unterbliebener Nachrichten* (Information service for news which have not been delivered): Aim of providing a counterpublicity from the view of new social movements



## 4. Developments in the 1970s (2)

Experience of autumn 1976 (media blackout after kidnapping of industry boss) → need for real independent left paper

Activists' Congress „Tunix“ (Do nothing) Berlin 1978 → founding of die tageszeitung (taz) as a national daily organised by a grassroots movement in 30 cities of idealistic and unprofessional activists (radical collective without hierarchy)



1978-1982: Die Neue as a socialist daily based on trade-unionism, but not sustainable



## 5. Development in the 1980s (1)

„Free radios“ (non-commercial private/community stations), organised as illegal („pirate“) stations by activists, converted into legal stations: *Radio Z* (Nuremberg 1987), *Radio Dreyeckland* (Freiburg/Br.), *Radio 100* (Berlin 1987), screened by state security



After *Radio 100* broadcasted the police radio communication during Berlin visit of US-president it was closed by police for a few hours.

Professionalisation/mainstreaming/commercialisation of alternative media and socio-cultural magazines like *taz*, *Zitty*, *tip*

Private radios/TV since 1984 (dual system) → More entertainment & sport (depolitisation)



Open access channels as alibi.

Citizens make own TV/radio, but low quality/hardly viewers.

## 5. Developments in the 1980s (2)

East: Umweltbibliothek 1986 publishes *Umweltblätter* (later *Telegraph*) as only opposition organ in East-Germany (printed by hand in very low numbers with church protection)



West/East: *Radio Glasnost*: Alternative West Berlin station *Radio 100* reports about opposition in GDR since 1987. Political attacks by GDR propaganda is publicity. GDR jams to prevent listening. Tapes with *Radio Glasnost* reports smuggled into GDR.

Eastern activists get cameras and report for Western TV-magazines about environmental problems and decay of cities. This way they reach a broad Eastern audience.

→ Eastern opposition media remain very small and gain influence only through quotes in Western media received in GDR

## 6. Developments in the 1990s/2000s (1)

Unification: East gets West German media system. Eastern papers are bought by West German companies or closed.

1992: Alternative daily *taz* converts into cooperative (one member one vote) → Readers (civil society) become owners (13.100 readers 11 mio €) and guaranty its independence

*taz* tries to keep link with civil society: Panterpreis, NGO-supplements, taz-Congresses, discussions at taz-Café

Most successful traditional publication of progressive civil society organisations: Greenpeace magazine (120.000 copies every 2 months)

The logo for Greenpeace Magazin, featuring the words "greenpeace" and "magazin." in white lowercase letters on a solid green rectangular background.

Mainstream media opened up towards civil society

Some mainstream media invite citizen journalists (Bild)

## 6. Developments in the 1990s/2000s (2)

### Computerization/digitalization:

1980s/early 1990s: Activists develop alternative bulletin boards and mailing lists in alternative computer networks

Mid 1990s: Introduction of WWW: Organisations/citizens and finally bloggers directly do self publishing in the web

2010s: Organisations present themselves on the web, but use Facebook and Twitter for campaigns and networking

Only few bloggers influential (eg. Bild-Blog, Niggemeier)

Indymedia (~2000-2006): international platform with local chapters mainly from critics of globalisation: People use cell-phones to phone in news which are posted on the Indymedia website



## 7. Conclusion (1)

Blogs/microblogs in Germany are less important than in China due to larger media freedom. Blogs/Microblogs are more fun/gimmick/entertainment and less channels for unreported news -> More trust in more pluralistic (traditional) media than in China.

Blogs/microblogs in Germany serve as additional sources for the traditional media, but cannot replace them at all

Traditional media have become more open towards social movements/civil society. Media have become less ideological, but real investigative reporting is rare. Danger of people being fed up with too much information (information fatigue)

Alternative media have remained small and only play an additional role, but have influenced traditional media and helped in opening them up towards civil society

## 7. Conclusion (2)

Media crisis: Shrinking advertisement market and change in media use → Closing down of papers, dismissal of editors, stronger centralisation/concentration. Internetpublishing not financially viable yet. Media more prone to PR-influence

Threats to media freedom are coming from economic pressures and rising costs, shrinking legal spaces for the protection of sources and reporting under stronger surveillance (NSA etc.). Less pluralism through less media

Civil society organisations should work with traditional media, but cannot solely rely on them. They have to develop their own communication and information channels on the web and in the blogosphere with a focus of direct electronic communication.