

The changed media landscape : interview with Heinz Bonfadelli : well entertained but badly informed

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a mass product

regional press. They also have the freedom to change their advertising spots into radio and television.

The publishers at first reacted helplessly to these changes. Would the readers be ready to pay more for their daily newspapers to compensate for the loss of advertisements? Edipress, the West Swiss quasi-monopolist, made an attempt but scarcely were the higher prices in effect when the circulation dropped significantly. The head of Edipress, Pierre Lamunière broke off the experiment quickly.

Media as brand-name products

Now is starting in Switzerland what, for example, happened in the United States about ten years ago. The publishing branch is moving away ever more from its political responsibility and is beginning to come to market as the newspaper which will be mass produced as the image of a brand-name product. The news magazine "Facts" of TA-Media ("Tages Anzeiger", "SonntagsZeitung") was the first publication in Switzerland to be catapulted onto the market according to the new rules of the game. Not a publicistic vision stood behind the magazine but a marketing idea which has been successfully implemented elsewhere. What happened with "Profil" in Austria and "Focus" in Germany must also be possible in German-speaking Switzerland. Developments seem to be proving the publishing house right: after three years and an investment of 42 million francs, "Facts" is already in black figures and has reached the circulation target of 100,000 copies.

Face lifting for many media

If the foundations of publishing in Switzerland have been revolutionised in this way, this has consequences for the editors. In a first step practically all Swiss newspapers have adopted a new layout in the last few months. Now consistent introduction of editorial marketing is the order of the day. This requires from all journalists, from the simple editor right up to the editor-in-chief, a new

professional understanding. Editors-in-chief are less and less able to limit themselves to writing leading articles. They are becoming involved with commercial responsibilities. Younger media people now direct themselves hardly to superior values of journalistic ethos, they interpret their role now rather more as neutral information providers and – particularly in the electronic media – as entertainers.

Thomas Bernhard, secretary of the journalist's trade union SJU is however not pessimistic: "Particularly in the bigger newspapers in Switzerland there still exists a remarkable potential in edi-

tors with a high journalistic ethos". The German media researcher Siegfried Weischenberg cannot speak too highly of Swiss journalists. Journalism here is still understood as a "good piece of enlightenment".

So in spite of critical considerations of today's changes in the Swiss press landscape, it should not be forgotten that internationally seen the Swiss press still offers above-average quality. Switzerland continues to be a newspaper Eldorado even if the gold veins are not quite as frequently found as previously. ■

The changed media landscape: Interview with Heinz Bonfadelli

Well entertained but badly informed

The launching of local radios and private television programmes in the 1980s has greatly changed the landscape and use of the Swiss media, says media researcher Heinz Bonfadelli.

Professor Bonfadelli, how do you perceive the situation of the Swiss media?

From the point of view of the media consumer the Swiss media market is more or less saturated. Only just 5% of all inhabitants today do without a television set. The level of cabling amounts to more than 80%, and there is a video recording set in about 60% of households. Since 1980, radio as well as television channels have multiplied and the programmes have expanded in terms of time.

And how has the press changed?

As far as the range of newspapers is concerned the total circulation of the press has continually grown. In consequence a good three-quarters of the adult population are reached today by the three information media, radio, television and newspaper. It is true that at the same time the number of titles has greatly fallen as a result of press concentration.

How long is the media read, listened to and watched daily?

Radio is a typical background medium:



Professor doctor Heinz Bonfadelli (born in 1949) has been since 1994 Professor extraordinary at the Institute for Journalistic Sciences and Media Research at the University of Zürich.

It is consumed about 3.5 hours a day, followed by television with 127 minutes a day. These figures are valid by the way for German-speaking Switzerland. The average length of newspaper reading is less, however. According to a survey it lies at 20 to 30 minutes a day.

Is then almost the whole of the population well informed?

It would be optimal if media use were reflected more or less one for one by the population accordingly informed. But since use of the media mostly takes place in free time entertainment motives



play an important role, and attention while reading, listening or watching remains relatively low, so that the situation as to the information of the population on political problems is modest. In addition there are marked differences in knowledge between the well and the badly informed.

What groups of population use mainly which media?

The print media are favoured by people with higher education and a higher standard of living, and status, as well as the politically more active. Women and young people prefer to read a book. Men and older people tend to pick up a newspaper more easily. Older people, the less educated, and those with lower professional status most frequently watch television. The younger watch foreign programmes, while the older are true to the national channels. In addition, in French-speaking Switzerland, people watch markedly more television than in German-speaking Switzerland, 143 minutes as opposed to 157 minutes for Italian-speakers. Radio is more frequently listened to in German-speaking Switzerland than in the French-speaking part, while older listeners again prefer the programme of the SBC and the younger favour the various local radios.

There are many broadcasting and reading possibilities. What purpose do they mainly serve?

The press is used as a source of infor-



Private TV stations such as "teleZÜRICH" characterise the media scene. (Photo: Keystone)

mation for 50%, television for 40%, and SBC radio 20%. Half of foreign television programmes are used for entertainment, domestic channels only one third. A third of the population watch the «Tagesschau» of the SBC at 19.30.

And what are the subjects which interest most?

In the local and regional area the interest is the greatest, followed by domestic and foreign politics. The latter is particularly appreciated in German-speaking Switzerland. In third place come subjects like science, research and ecology on the one hand (particularly in the French-speaking part), and accidents and crime on the other. Sports and



culture interest every third person. Economics succeeds in attracting only a quarter of the population.

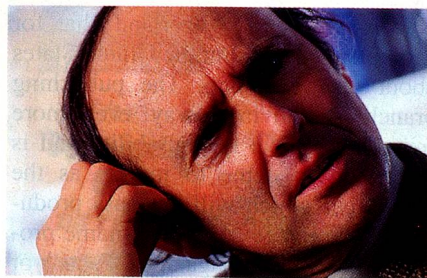
Has quality increased with the expansion of media?

Today's population is a multi-media generation, and in terms of time the audio-visual dominate. The media offer has grown while the leisure offer has stagnated. The result of this was that in parallel, the use of the media has become briefer, particularly for young people, who use slogans like «zapping» and «background consumption». And the media have given themselves over

increasingly to «infotainment»: more pictures and colours, personalised stories with much emotion are the result.

What will be Switzerland's media landscape in the next millennium?

At present developments such as "digitalisation", "multi-media" and "internet" are hotly discussed in the public.



Although their distribution remains relatively low, it must be assumed that in the future a large part of today's media consumption will develop through these new information technologies.

Interview: Alice Baumann

Photos: Jean-Jacques Ruchti

The 15 largest Swiss newspapers

SonntagsBlick	330 067
Tages-Anzeiger	283 139
Le Matin Dimanche	226 465
SonntagsZeitung	217 007
Neue Zürcher Zeitung	162 330
Südostschweiz	144 351
Berner Zeitung	134 153
Neue Luzerner Zeitung	131 761
St. Galler Tagblatt	119 391
Aargauer Zeitung	118 572
Basler Zeitung	115 297
Weltwoche	91 142
24 heures	89 486
Tribune de Genève	76 739
Cash	71 417

(1997 figures)