

## Södertörn University

This is a submitted version of a paper published in *INTED2011 Proceedings : 5th International Technology, Education and Development Conference Valencia, Spain. 7-9 March, 2011*

Citation for the published paper:

Hök, Jöran (2011). Connecting the Local and the Global in Journalism Education. In *INTED2011 Proceedings : 5th International Technology, Education and Development Conference Valencia, Spain. 7-9 March, 2011*. Valencia: IATED, p. 6326-6332.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-15262>

DiVA 

<http://sh.diva-portal.org>

# **CONNECTING THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL IN JOURNALISM EDUCATION**

**Paper for INTED 2011: the International Technology, Education and Development  
Conference in Valencia 7-9 March 2011**

**Jöran Hök**

*Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden  
Joran.hok@sh.se*

## **Abstract**

This paper is looking into efforts made to introduce local-global connections within journalist programs at Södertörn University in Stockholm. This University was a pioneer in multimedia journalism education when founded 15 years ago. New Information Technology is a part of a globalization process and it has had wide impact on the development of mass media practices in all societies. Technical multimedia skills are today central to advanced journalism education at universities. Globalization has in that sense colored journalism programs. For instance is multimedia journalism at Södertörn University one of the most popular journalism university programs in Sweden.

However, very little space in journalism education is given to knowledge about and skills in covering different aspects of globalization. News coverage of processes and events outside the home country is seldom a part of the training for students in journalism, not even at advanced levels. The courses are predominantly national in scope with few exceptions. Several recent reports emphasize that lack of international focus is a problem for journalist programs in general in Sweden although the national university authority has urged for change.

In this paper I propose a method for changing this inward-looking education. The challenge is to use local knowledge and skills that are available, mostly inexpensive and in reach by using a 'four-step' approach during the educational program.

**Keywords:** Local-global, news coverage, journalist program, international linkages, globalization.

'[Newspapers] fill an important niche between television and academe, offering an accessible way for busy people to learn about distant events and an outlet for writing that captures the essence of a time and place without polemics or pedantry. They can put events in context, explain human behavior and belief, evoke a way of life. Foreign correspondents can burrow into a society, cultivate strangers' trust, follow meandering trails and dig beneath layers of diplomatic spin and government propaganda'

**Pamela Constable, *Washington Post*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

## **1 THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL IN NEWS PRODUCTION**

The quotation above is about usefulness. News production in mass media is still one of the most important channels for information to citizen about important events and recent developments in world society. Foreign correspondence and bureau service are traditionally producing the main part of "foreign news" in newspaper, television and radio. But traditional media enterprises are mostly covering the national and local arena. Journalists produce for consumers on short distance and material from abroad is also judged by what is important for the readers nationally or locally.

Proximity is one of the buzzwords for news items passing a journalist gatekeeper. Subjects or events that are close geographically or seen as close culturally are more likely to be published or broadcasted, especially when it comes to international news. [1]

The reason is not very complicated: what is well-known or what you already are acquainted with is something that you want to follow, learn more about and stay in touch with.

Although, the problem in international news is that some subjects and some areas thereby will be left out, which in the long run can have severe consequences, for instance when the public is unaware of changing relations and threats in international relations.

A most spectacular example is an event which occurred ten years ago. An American citizen was two months before September 11 in 2001 was visited by Mohammed Atta, one of the air plane hijackers. Mr Atta wanted to hire small air-planes which he wanted to empty (with the exception of the pilot chair) to fill with "pesticides". When this was rejected, Mr Atta highly and at some length spoke of al-Queda and that the world should learn more from Usama bin-Laden. But Mr Attas audience, the American citizen did not strike alarm. The FBI or CIA, not even the local police learned about this before it was too late. The witness said she had no idea what al-Queda was and she had never heard of bin-Laden. [2]

Leading journalists have used this example to show that neglects in American news media made the American public unaware of the dangerous situation (Fenton 2005). There is of course no guarantee that knowledge of al-Queda would have stopped the tragedy of September 11, but some lessons can be learned: what we witnessed was aspects of globalization which we cannot escape. Polarization and militarization of identity politics in connection with the revolution of in international technology and communications has created profound changes also in global security relations, and it concerns us all (Srebreny/ Paterson 2005, Kaldor 2006).

Local and global events and processes are in this and many other aspect of social life already interconnected in unprecedented scale and this should also profoundly have an impact on news production.

There was a time when local or 'national' news was quite enough for citizens. What was happening in other countries was not seen as very important. The world 'outside' was far away from daily living. Today this situation has changed radically. The world has entered our workplaces and living room. The outer world is part of every-day life and we are all more or less connected to a world-society. But news journalism is still strong locally or nationally connected, or if you may say so, biased. News journalists around the world use domestic binoculars.

The German mass communication researcher Kai Hafez made the following statement after a thorough overview of international reporting in his home country:

“Only a small number of countries, topics and perspectives make it into the international reporting within a particular nation. Often, the only thing universal or global about the world-view of different media systems is that they all suffer from the same problem: the domestication of the world. Media content is distorted whenever international reporting more strongly reflects the national interest and cultural stereotypes of the reporting country than the news reality of the country being reported about” (Hafez 2007)

Sometimes the lack of perspectives is criticised among scholars urging for a more internationalist or even global outlook. A year after the spectacular event of September 11 2001 the German reporter Sonia Mikich noted:

“Never have the Germans been so connected with other countries, economically and politically. Never has their need to understand world events been greater.”

But, she sadly concluded:

“Surely this is a period with much to offer correspondents and reporters. Not necessarily. The vivid reality of whole continents never or only rarely makes it into reports on Asia, South America, Australia (unless they have a refugee drama), a bankruptcy (Argentina) or royal baby (Japan) as a peg on which to hang the story” (2002, quoted in Hafez 2007, p 26)

## **2. SHRINKING COVERAGE OF ‘FOREIGN NEWS’**

The same process has been documented in many other leading media states, not at least in United States. Outraged by the decline in foreign news, the CBS senior foreign correspondent Tom Fenton recently wrote:

“Stories that seek to explain the relevance of incremental developments in far-off countries rarely see the light of day. They get spiked by evening news producers preoccupied by rating, because most people in our business are convinced – wrongly I believe – that the public couldn’t care less about foreign news.” (Fenton 2005, p 4).

Fenton noted that during the two decades before September 11, American newspaper editors and television executives reduced coverage of foreign news by 70 to 80 percent. There was a “brief renaissance” after September 11, but it only lasted for a year (ibid p. 17).

Foreign news stories has are given less space in British media, which is confirmed by a recent study (2010) of four British newspapers:

“Taking the whole newspaper into account, the number of foreign news stories across the four newspapers in the weeks studied fell – in absolute terms – by just under 40%, from 502 stories in total during the week in 1979, to 308 stories in total in 2009.

The greatest fall happened between 1989 and 1999 when the number of international stories published fell by 20%. But the trend, though less steep, has continued since then, falling by another 10% between 1999 and 2009” (Moore 2010)

Traditionally news bureaus and correspondents stationed abroad have been main sources for foreign news in newspapers, radio and television news programmes all over the world. But during the last decade we have witnessed a slow decline in bureau news output and amount of correspondents. The Media Researcher Thomas McPhail finds three main reasons for this international trend; two connected to the economies of the bureaus, the other to ratings:

- (1) it is too costly to station full-time reporters abroad
  - (2) it is easier sending reporters abroad on short assignments as travelling costs have gone down
  - (3) lack of interest among editors concerning routine events in distant lands
- (McPhail 2010 p.45)

If we claim that people all over the world are in need of day-to-day trustworthy information which can help them evaluating events and processes on the world arena we can ask if there for the time being

are any alternatives to *national* media, to bureau and correspondent coverage. Can this reporting be complemented or even replaced by other information sources?

In a recent study Richard Sambrook, former BBC Director of Global News, says that the correspondent may have played out its role. Sambrook urges news organizations to change their structure from “vertically integrated news operations to a more open and networked approach with new partnerships with locally based services and social media sites.” (Reuter Institute, press release December 2010). Social media can be a complement to traditional news coverage. But for this to sustain in times of economic crisis, Sambrook call for the finding of “new economic models which can sustain international operations; and training and recruiting to provide the expertise and cultural flexibility needed in the 21st century” (ibid). This expertise is needed “for all of us trying to understand our place in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world” (ibid.).

This somewhat defensive approach opens the information arena for new actors reporting parallel with traditional media and sometimes in cooperation with ‘traditional’ journalism.

A more offensive attitude toward alternatives is drawn up by Charlie Beckett, the director of “Polis” the Institute for research and debate on journalism and society within London School of Economics. In his intriguing book “SuperMedia: saving journalism so it can save the world” he takes the success of the Kuwait- and London-based news agency Al-jazeera as “a major step forward for a more networked global journalism”:

“With the addition of other channels, such as France 24 and African versions, we are seeing the creation of a diverse and interconnected broadcast news world. If that system can begin to exploit the potential of its online operations in the way Reuters has done, then there is a vast potential for interaction between the blogosphere, citizen journalism and these vast global platforms” (Beckett 2008 p 138-139). [3]

A third approach, which can be seen as a complement, is to use local-global interconnectedness, for instance in small local newspapers and web-sites.

Globalization and localization are parallel processes, which by some researchers are characterized as features of a glocalized society, (Hemer/Tufte 2005 ) To be up to date news media has to follow these parallel processes, but relating to what has been said in this paper there seem to be limited capacity. During the financial crisis international news in traditional news media has been a loser. As stated earlier, the last century has witnessed a decline in international news reporting (Altmeppen 2008, Hafez 2009, Moore 2010). An interesting tendency is that we at the same time have witnessed an increase in publishing of super-local new magazines and web sites. Even if there is no direct link between these processes, they are of great importance for the future of journalist local-global links. To my knowledge there is no research on how these super-local magazines and sights cover global-local linkages. Following some of these sights and magazines, for instance local magazines in Stockholm, there is little evidence that these news channels are of any significant importance in that sense.

To sum up traditional foreign news coverage has shrunk and it has not been replaced. Different sights at the internet may function as replacement for a small segment of elite readers, but not for the main bulk of media consumers. Efforts to complement or even replace traditional foreign news reporting are not significant.

### **3. A TASK FOR JOURNALISM EDUCATION**

In one important sense globalization has made radical changes for journalists all over the world. New Information Technology has had wide impact on the development of and access to mass media in all societies. It has also made difference in journalist training. Technical multimedia skills are today central to advanced journalism education at universities and other schools. Södertörn University in Stockholm was a pioneer in introducing multimedia journalism in education when the University was founded 15 years ago. Multimedia journalism is not only popular among the students. The skills are or growing importance for employers, as more journalist work demands multiple skills. Today many young journalists have to know how to produce for the web, as well as newspapers and also a television channels at an integrated work place.

But do university journalism programs promote reporting on international and global events and processes?

An overview made 2006 by the Swedish magazine Scoop, published by the Swedish organization of investigative reporting gave a pessimistic answer. The survey showed that there were no international courses among the leading journalist schools in the country (Scoop 2 2008). Knowledge about world society and skills in covering different aspects of globalization is not prioritized in journalism education in Sweden. News coverage of processes and events outside the home country is seldom part of the training for students in journalism, even at advanced levels. The courses are predominantly national in scope with few exceptions. This is a problem at all other journalist programs in Sweden although the university authority (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education) at several occasions has urged for changes.

The framework for the internationalization of higher education in Sweden is laid down in Sweden's Higher Education Act which stipulates that:

"The institutions of higher education should furthermore in their activities promote understanding of other countries and of international conditions."

In a report in 2000 the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education evaluated journalist educations in five cities. The report found very few measures taken in direction of internationalization of education:

"The international dimensions of the curricula must be strengthened. International exchange of students and teachers should be encouraged and courses and literature should reflect a more global perspective".

When the report was followed up five years later the Agency found a few steps in the right direction, but in general the problem remained (Reports 2000: 5 and 2007:4).

There ought to be room for research of why internationalization of journalism education has made limited progress. Sweden is a country with a strong international reputation. Many Swedish citizens are working abroad and many others are travelling many times a year. Sweden has several large companies in other countries and it makes a large contribution to development aid in former Eastern Europe, in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Why this bleak contribution to a global awareness? A hypothesis is that educators first and foremost concentrate on the needs of the local media industry and therefore concentrate on topics concerning processes and events within the home country.

#### **4. STEPS TO CONNECT LOCAL AND GLOBAL IN JOURNALISM PROGRAMS**

Journalism education can be an agent for change. In this paper I would like to argue that the proximity factor can be used as a tool for connecting the local and the global in international news production as well as in journalism education. [4]

Students can be made familiar with the local-global connection at an early stage in a vocational program. The idea is to use a four step ladder, where each step is a bit more complicated, Every step is easy to reach for the students within the six semesters at Södertörn University.

##### *STEP 1: Report on global-change-footsteps in your home town*

During a lecture on international news production during the first semester I propose that the students should start investigating local-global connection in their home region (county), hometown or, if it is a large city, in their part of the city. What should be researched are *changes* in these areas that can be explained by international factors.

My hometown, a small town in southwest Sweden with 30 000 inhabitants, can be used as an example. When I grew up we had a brewery, a shoe factory, and a textile factory in the city. 30 years later there none of this left. The nearest brewery is 10 miles away and it has been bought by a multilateral company. There are very few shoe companies in Sweden as a whole. The nearest shoe industries can be found in Portugal and Italy, but most shoes are bought from Asia. Textiles are mainly imported from Southeast Asia.

The students can replicate this small investigation in their hometown and use the contacts and knowledge which they already own. Changes or shifts are not only visible in production. Students can

use examples that have to do with education, immigration, sport activities. They can look at what can be found on the shelves in the local supermarket, what kind of restaurants that has been established during the last decade and new sport activities, imported from other countries. They can use several sources; look in local newspapers to see what is different when comparing with the same paper 15 years ago, they can interview relatives, friends, local politicians, researchers and member of organizations to find out in which ways the outside world has made impact. The work can be done the first semester, and I suggest they propose it during there first two week practice at a local newspaper, which is part of the fourth course during the first semester.

#### STEP 2: *Report on twin town projects*

Several Swedish communities have far-reaching contacts with local administrations in twin towns in other parts of Europe, recently also in Africa and Asia. This is a growing activity with hundreds of communities involved, but it is still under-reported in journalism.

I visited South Africa in 2008 with the purpose to write about this cooperation for the magazine "OmVärlden". The city council of Buffalo city in Southeast South African Republic has far-reaching cooperation with the Swedish city of Gävle. The projects deal with administrative education but also medical care and organization of fire brigades. Swedish civil servants go to SSA to take part in twin projects and their colleagues in SSA go to Sweden to study administration. These efforts are meant to be of advantage for both parts and are not classified as development aid.

Students at Södertörn University are encouraged to contact Swedish local councils to report on development co-operation. Students can make interviews with the civil servants and politicians involved but also as an investigative effort trying to discuss and/or evaluate the outcomes of the cooperation. Reports can be published in local newspapers or on local websites in Sweden and also in English in cooperation with news papers and sites in the twin city or community. [5]

The advantage of this report project is that it is of importance for the local public, that the reporters easily can reach local experts and that is also open opportunities to travel.

#### STEP 3: *Report on local-global contributions from international institutions, organizations and companies*

Reports of twin projects between communities can be complemented by reports on the work of International institutions as governmental bodies, mainly foreign departments and national development cooperation institutes as the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), focusing on the part of their job which is directed toward local-global connections. International or transnational corporations are often reported on but seldom in-depth. Ways in which has their work has made difference or even changed local communities fundamentally has already been mentioned connected to Step one. But during the third step students can do more thorough investigations. More over-looked are research institutes as Nordic Africa Institute, Swedish International Peace Research Institute and Center for Baltic and East European Studies and also transnational institutes as International Idea. Together with international organizations as Save the Children, Amnesty International and Medecins Sans Frontiers they are contributing to creating local-global links, and as they often work with information and education at the grass-root level, their work is easy to grasp for student reporters. Many of the organizations are active locally all over the country, which will make it easy to play the proximity card. Subjects that are important are how the organizations tackle global issues as climate change, global pandemics, peace and development and human rights. But reporters can also concentrate on stories focusing on experts and members: their personal motives, dreams, ideals, expectations and experiences.

#### STEP 4: *Excursions and scholarships*

The fourth and last step in reach is about going abroad with support from universities and sometimes also from other institutions. Students at the Norwegian journalist school in Oslo are able to travel to a country in Asia, Africa or Latin-America as a part of the training. The excursion is partly sponsored by the Norwegian Development Aid Institute, is directed toward reporting on development, but is integrated in the educational program and has supervisors from the University. This model is still not in use in Sweden, but students can individually apply for a scholarship from Sida which makes it possible for them to study, travel and conduct a report for a period of at least seven weeks as part of their BA. The report, a "Minor Field Study" is supervised by the University, is produced in cooperation with a University in the guest country and is also presented at the development institute. The study can be focusing local-global issues even if that is not a precondition. As an alternative it is also possible for students who do not get a grant to go on their own and produce a BA essay with relevance for local-global linkages.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

New international information technology has made vast impact on European journalism as well as journalist programs at Swedish Universities. But there has hitherto been and still is very limited space within in journalism education programs for courses on knowledge about globalization as such and skills in covering different aspect of this phenomenon. The explanation is that journalism courses focus on reporting in the home country and that "foreign" reporting has been seen as connected to expensive efforts and exclusive issues. We have seen very few changes in this although the national university authority has urged for change.

In this paper I have suggested that the University can do better without having expensive programs on Foreign Correspondence. We can use local knowledge and skills that are inexpensive and in reach. Four 'steps' during different phases of the educational program is suggested.

The first and most easy step is about covering several aspects of social changes connected to globalization in the student's home town, for example changes connected to work places, production, communications and education.

The second step is also in close reach: to report on twinning programs between local communities in Sweden and other countries.

The third step focus reporting on international organizations, institutions or companies active in the home town or region.

Fourthly and finally students can to go abroad to cover activities connected to step (1) or (2) as part of exchange programs, Minor Field Studies or other initiatives in cooperation with local universities. With efforts like this journalist education can be a forerunner for Swedish news and feature reporting on interregional, international and global events and processes, which is important when traditional "foreign reporting" has been scaled down.

## NOTES

[1] This was registered early in mass communication studies and has been tested empirically by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmberg-Ruge in an often quoted study from 1965 on subjects in international news. See also Srebreny et al for an overview of this research.

[2] Another example is Iran, where lack of knowledge of the area made the American opinion (and to a large extent also the administration in Washington) unaware of social changes that forced the Shah to step down giving place to a totally different regime that radically changed the attitude and strategy towards the United States (Arno/Dissanayake 1984).

[3] Some new approaches to foreign news reporting are presented in Nieman Reports 64 (Fall 2010). These are use of more local reporters, teamworking among stringers, cooperation projects with researchers and use of local bloggers.

[4] This is well in line with the general intention for Higher Education at Universities in Sweden.

[5] SKL International is a consultant bureau connected to Swedish local authorities and regions. It has for the time being projects in 34 countries ([www.sklinternational.se](http://www.sklinternational.se))

## REFERENCES

- Altmeyden, Klaus-Dieter: "The gradual disappearance of foreign news in German television: is there a future for global, international, world or foreign news? Research paper presented at the "Future of Journalism" Conference, Cardiff 2008.
- Arno, Andrew/ Dissanayake, Wimal: *The News Media in National and International Conflict*, Boulder Colorado, 1984
- Beckett, Charlie: *SuperMedia: saving journalism so it can save the world*, Blackwell, Chichester, 2008
- Fenton, Tom: *Bad News – the decline of reporting, the business of news and the danger to us all*, Harper, New York, 2005
- Follow-up evaluation of journalist programs at Universities in Sweden, Report from Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2007:4 (in Swedish)
- Hafez, Kai: *The Myth of Media Globalization*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007
- Hafez, Kai: "Global Journalism for Global Governance? Theoretical Visions, Practical Constraints", paper for journalist seminar, *Linné University*, Kalmar, Sweden, March 2009
- Hemer, Oscar/ Tufte, Thomas: *Media and Glocal Change: rethinking communication for development*, Clacso books, Buenos Aires, 2005
- Journalist Programs at Universities, Report from Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2000:3 (in Swedish)
- Kaldor, Mary: *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 2 ed., Polity press, Cambridge 2006
- McPhall, Thomas: *Global communication: theories, stakeholders and trends*, Wiley-Blackwell, Singapore 2010
- Moore, Martin: *Shrinking World - The decline of international reporting in the British press*, Media Standard Trust, London 2010
- Nieman Reports: "Reporting from faraway places: who does it and how", vol 64, no 3, 2010
- Sambrook, Richard: "Are foreign correspondents redundant?" Research Paper, *Reuters Institute of the Study of Journalism*, London, October 2010
- Scoop, Swedish Magazine for Investigative Reporting, no 2-2008
- Scholte, Jan Aart: *Globalization: a critical introduction*, Palgrave, London 2005
- Srebreny, Anna-Maria/ Paterson, Chris: *Shouting from Rooftops: International News in the 21st Century*, New York, 2004

## About the author

**Jöran Hök**: Senior Lecturer at Södertörn University, the second University of Stockholm, founded in 1996. Södertörn University has grown rapidly and has for the time being more than 14 000 students and within the University the largest journalist school in Sweden with an intake of more than 100 journalism students per semester.

I was for more than ten years editor-in-chief of the Swedish Development Magazine *OmVärlden* (in-the-world) 1998-2009, lecturer and research fellow at Gothenburg University 1986-1998 (Peace and Development Research Institute and Department for Journalism and Mass Communication) and lecturer at Stockholm University (Department for Journalism, Media and Communication) 2007-2009. Main research project: conditions for journalism in post-conflict states, comparative studies of journalist cultures, international relations in foreign reporting