

Cracks in the foundations?

Shifting consensual relations in two media fields in Norway

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ABSTRACT

An important characteristic of the Nordic media model is consensual relations between state and industry stakeholders. However, recent studies indicate that these relationships have become less consensual in some Nordic countries. In this article, we investigate the developments and current situation in the Norwegian media and literary field through a comparative case study of the print news media and the book market. In both industries, the regulatory schemes were developed, while democratic corporatist solutions were widespread. Despite large political transformations in other societal sectors, we find that the most important parts of the two systems are still intact, while the state remains predominantly supportive. In the field of news media, intra-industry relations are largely intact, enabling the field to protect their privileges from outsiders and unwanted political initiatives. In the more heterogenous and less organised field of literature, tensions between actors are rising, and this poses a threat to the Norwegian literary welfare state.

KEYWORDS: media support schemes, cultural policy, sociology of markets, cultural fields, collective action

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Introduction

The concept of the media welfare state (Syvertsen et al., 2014) emphasises how the Nordic media model reflects the general Nordic governance model. The Nordic countries are characterised by 1) strong public service media, generous subsidies, and other support schemes; 2) relatively egalitarian patterns in news consumption; 3) a high level of public trust in the news media; and 4) consensual relations between the media stakeholders (see Schrøder et al., Chapter 1; see also Ala-Fossi, 2020; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

However, in a recent study of Sweden, Jakobsson and colleagues (2021) found that the consensual relations between media companies and the state no longer characterise the Swedish media market (see also Baeten et al., 2015). They argued that the relationship between stakeholders in the Swedish media system has been far less “consensual” than Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) seem to have assumed. Already in the 1970s, there was open disagreement between leading industry actors and the state about the system of tax on advertising revenues, which redistributed income from rich to economically weaker newspapers (Engblom et al., 2002). The disagreements have increased in later years, and one outcome of this conflict has been the removal of the tax on advertisers.

In this article, we therefore study the consensual relations in the Norwegian media system and ask the following questions:

- RQ1. Has the relationship between state and industry stakeholders changed?
- RQ2. Has the relationship between the various industry stakeholders changed?

Since the 1990s, the traditional Scandinavian corporatist model, characterised by consensual democratic governance and a strong and active presence of interest groups, has been subject to growing pressure (de la Porte et al., 2022). Engelstad and colleagues (2017: 65) concluded in their review that

even if global trends are noticeable in the Nordic region, salient issues indicate that the specificity of the Nordic model is by no means irrelevant. (i) The Internet as a global phenomenon has a considerable influence on the structure of the media in all Nordic countries, but it does not nullify the specific traits of the Nordic region in relation to the strong position of public service broadcasting and public support for the press. (ii) The field of arts and culture is becoming more influenced by market forces and private support. Nevertheless, broad public subvention and national arts councils significantly affect the funding of cultural life.

In the Norwegian variant of the Nordic media welfare state, there are two strong and long-lasting institutions: the regulation of the print news media

and the regulation of the book market. Our investigation focuses on these institutions, the reasons being 1) they by far are the two most important written cultural genres in Norway, and 2) both schemes were established in the 1960s, have been evaluated several times, and each evaluation concludes that the policies have been successful. They have largely contributed to their objectives: a differentiated daily press (Norwegian Government, 2017) and strong, Norwegian-language literature (Bjerke et al., 2022). The evaluations also conclude, in line with Syvertsen and colleagues (2014), that broad support within the relevant fields has been an important prerequisite for their success (Halvorsen et al., 2020).

The two institutions were developed when the Norwegian social democratic reign was at its height, and the literary policy that emerged was strongly influenced by the democratic corporatist model (Bjerke et al., 2022; Halvorsen & Bjerke, 2023; Rønning & Slaatta, 2019), and both institutions have been under pressure from a liberal political narrative, as well as digitalisation and globalisation. It may be said that the news media and book market regulations in Norway represent the most “extreme” version of the Nordic media welfare state model when it comes to the consensual relations between the media stakeholders; therefore, it is of strategic research interest.

Theoretical approach

There is a long tradition within the sociology of culture to approach cultural production as a meso-level social space with autonomy from other societal domains (Bourdieu, 1993, 2000; Escarpit, 1971). In recent years, the same approach has spread to the sociology of news (Lowrey & Sherill, 2019: 247). These approaches assume that markets are organised social spaces situated between the individual agency and the state level, where the social arenas are generally defined by actors, roles, positions, social relations, and shared logics. Field theory is one of these approaches, and it serves as the analytical starting point for our investigation. An important assumption in this perspective is that fields are characterised by both conflict and consensual relations. While conflicts are motivated by competition over scarce resources, consensual relationships develop from a shared interest in a mutually beneficial social order (Bourdieu, 1993; Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012).

A field consists of a hierarchy of privileged and less privileged positions. The dominant actors, or incumbents, hold the most important (and prestigious) positions and wield an unproportional authority over the field. In contrast, the challengers occupy less privileged positions in the field and wield little influence over its operation. They are able to articulate alternative visions of the field and their position in it, but they typically abide their time, conform to the prevailing order, and limit their opposition to jockeying for some improvement in their position (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012: 13).

According to Fligstein (2001: 32), stable market interaction requires four types of institutions: property rights, rules for exchange, governance structures, and conceptions of control. Property rights and rules for exchange are defined by state laws. The governance structures, on the other hand, consist of both laws and informal practices. In many fields, internal governance units are established, “charged with overseeing fields rules and, in general facilitating the overall smooth functioning and reproduction of the system” (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012: 13–14). The conceptions of control are general agreements between the actors about the architecture of the hierarchy within the field and a shared understanding of how to conduct business (Fligstein, 2001: 32). Both the internal governance units and the conceptions of control tend to represent the interests of the incumbents and aid them in maintaining their position in the field hierarchy.

The development within a specific field is both affected by local agency and the field’s relationship to adjacent fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012: 18). The state support for news media and literature makes a field dependent on the field of politics. According to Geir Vestheim (2012), in the cultural industry, this creates an overlap between culture, politics, and the market, in which competing logics strive (see also Halvorsen et al., 2020), and in a recent article, Per Mangset (2020) asked if cultural politics has come to an end. In such situations, internal governance units might play an important role as liaisons between the incumbents and the field of politics (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012: 14).

Depending on the distribution of power between and within fields, different market configurations and interaction patterns can emerge. Firms and the state alike tend to seek stability in the market interaction, and stable market conditions favour mutual beneficial cooperation and a low degree of tension. According to Ostrom (2005), institutional frameworks governing collective goods – for example, support schemes and privileges such as exemptions from competition laws – work best (and perhaps only) if they have broad support in the field, so that the schemes are not deliberately exploited by field actors.

Changes in the political field could change the fields of news media and literature. According to Fligstein (2001: 46–47), the market dynamic in welfare states, such as the Nordic countries at the height of social democratic reign, was characterised by the state as a very active market actor and frequent direct state interventions. State interventions in markets, with a standoff between workers and capitalist interests, as exemplified by Norway post-1981, are typically less frequent and more dependent on the relative strength of different interest groups. In this situation, the stability of the fields of literature and news media could be expected to depend more on the internal coordination and consensual relations between local stakeholders. Conception of control represents “local knowledge” of how to act in a field, which could be watered down by the entrance of large numbers of new actors.

Digitalisation and globalisation have opened the field of media and literature to new players who previously operated in other markets. However, the new actors do not necessarily act in accordance with the field's internal rules of action. Thus, their entrance could threaten field stability, yet stability might be maintained through state support or joint defence of the field logic and institutions by established field actors.

Fligstein has stressed the central position of the state, which has “considerable and generally unrivaled potential to impact the stability of most Strategic Action Fields” (Fligstein, 2013: 44). And a way to keep such stability is to create “consensual relations”, which, according to Syvertsen and colleagues (2014: 19), has been at the core of the media welfare state:

At each crucial moment in media history, we see a preference for consensual and cooperative policies, rather than clean-cut statist or market-led solutions [...]. Nonetheless, cooperation does not mean that private companies are overly restricted in their operations or that the interests of state and industry merge. As we have noted, the Nordic states have always had relatively open economies, allowing Nordic companies to take advantage of global market opportunities, while at the same time benefitting from protective policies intended to defend domestic media from the twin pressures of marketization and globalization.

Market stability also depends on the market's relations to other markets. Field transformations are often the result of an invasion of new actors from other markets with different logics, which could lead to a larger offset of the social order. Fligstein (2001: 84), for instance, described situations in which field rules and unity are at stake, as episodes of contention.

Methods and data

In this article, we want to investigate the developments and characteristics of the market interaction and governance of the literature and news media. The research strategy partly draws on the tradition of historical media research. According to Dahl (2000: 60), an important part of historical media research is contextualisation:

In a media historical study, there is hardly any context around the research object that can be taken for granted, in the same way that other media research can take the environment for granted. One must establish the meaningful environment as part of the survey, which other media researchers most often avoid.

We have tried to contextualise the historical background of the news media and literary welfare state of Norway, using relevant literature, such as Fidjestøl's (2015) history of Arts Council Norway and Hjeltnes's (2010)

history of the Norwegian press. These volumes have served as a point of departure for studies consisting of books, research articles, governmental and parliamentary documents, and newspaper articles. In the second part of our investigation, we take the findings from part one and analyse recent development traits after 2010, leading up to the present situation. This part of the analysis is based on interviews with three senior cultural politicians, as well as key actors in the various stakeholder groups. Within the field of literature, we have interviewed decision-makers in 27 publishing houses; prominent literates within different genres; librarians and other decision-makers within the library sector; representatives of Arts Council Norway; and representatives of the main associations in the literary field and book market.

In the field of print and digital news media, our informants include all the important interest organisations and governance units in the field, the editors of a variety of Norwegian news media, and the Norwegian Media Authority. All interviews are what Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) referred to as factual interviews, where the interviewees have provided actual information and their own assessments of real and hypothetical issues. All the interviews have been conducted in accordance with the principle of informed consent.

The emergence and development of the Norwegian media and literary field, 1965–2010

The support schemes for news media and literature both consist of two elements: direct financial support on the one hand, and tax exemptions and other privileges on the other. The “packages” of support schemes were both introduced in the mid-1960s by a social democratic government (literature) and non-socialist coalition (press support), respectively, with the industry’s bodies as driving forces. The incumbents in both fields perceived a “crisis situation” and successfully turned to the authorities to get help to resolve it, appealing to national and democratic concerns. The support scheme for literature was introduced in 1965 after a long political process where the future of Norwegian language and national culture was the dominant concern (Fidjestøl, 2015), while the support schemes for the press were introduced from 1969 on the basis of a perception of the fear of breakdown concerning the “diversified newspaper system” (Olsen, 1998; Sletten, 1979).

Both support packages consisted of VAT exemptions and direct support to field actors. Economically weak newspapers received supportive grants. For literature, an automatic purchasing system was established, in which the state bought 1,000 copies of all Norwegian fiction books from the publishers and distributed them freely to public libraries. The publishers, bookstores, and authors were also allowed to negotiate collective prices and fees.

There was broad agreement in both the relevant fields and the political field that these situations required action, but in both cases, there were dis-

agreements about what kind of measures were best suited. In the parliament, the Conservative Party voted *against* the production support (Halvorsen & Bjerke, 2023) and accepted only under strong doubt the purchasing scheme. Crucial to the Conservative Party's support for the latter was that, in principle, *all* fiction publications should be purchased, so that the state could not in any way control the policy of the established publishers (Bjerke et al., 2022).

The press support schemes were made as “objective” as possible. VAT exemption applied to all newspapers and books. The “quality” of the product was not assessed. All number-2 newspapers (newspapers not being the largest in their municipality) published at least twice a week, a circulation of 2,000, and that had broad, current content with an emphasis on politics, culture, and society could receive production grants. In addition, number-1 newspapers with a circulation of less than 6,000 also qualified for support.

Both the news media and the literature support schemes were designed and established in close cooperation with the stakeholders in the field (Freihow, 2001; Halvorsen et al., 2020; Hjeltnes, 2010; Ringdal 1993). New internal governance units, in which the field's organisations had a central position, were established (Halvorsen et al., 2020).

Jakobsson and colleagues (2021) described how the Swedish press support scheme was partly set up as an internal redistribution system within the field of news media. The redistribution of wealth represented a manifest conflict of interest among the industry actors. As a result, the Swedish incumbents opposed the system from the beginning. In Norway, the leading Social Democrats “learned” from the Swedish discussions and avoided this kind of internal redistribution systems for the newspapers (Olsen, 1998: 34ff).

The Labour Party “returned” to office in 1971 and ruled most of the 1970s. During this period, production support significantly increased (sevenfold in real value from 1971 to 1979). This increased support was particularly in favour of the Labour Party's own newspapers (Halvorsen & Bjerke, 2023).

In the 1980s, the political landscape changed from a worker–state coalition to a standoff between parties representing capitalist and worker's interests (Fligstein, 2001: 46). In the following two decades, the political interests and direct intervention in the various cultural fields dropped. As a result, direct support was gradually scaled down by different ruling coalitions over the next twenty years. Still, the main features of the system prevailed. The press support scheme and the VAT exemption were retained. Another consequence of the reduced political interest in the field was that the development of the support scheme practices was left to the field actors and the public administration. Thus, the incumbents were able to exercise control over the field through the interest organisations and field-specific conceptions of control, such as the idea that the press should be independent from the state and that the editor should have unrestricted power (also from their owners) over the content of their publication. In the field of literature, the view was that the

publishers alone should decide which books deserved publication (and thus be purchased by the state). In addition, there was a widespread perception that the purchasing scheme was working well, was necessary, and should not be changed.

During this period, some important changes were made to both schemes, but in all instances, they served the same purpose: to include deserving challengers in the scheme in an order that contributed to ensuring the stability and legitimacy of the governance system. In 1989, production grants were opened to the smallest local newspapers. The circulation limit was reduced from 2,000 to 1,000, and the requirement for the number of releases from two to one per week.

In the same period, the book purchasing scheme was also extended to new types of literature: first to children's and youth books, then to translated literature, and finally in 2005, to non-fiction. The path to the inclusion of new literature was far less harmonic, however. The situation during the last part of the 1990s can be characterised as an episode of contention (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), with at least three field-disrupting conflicts taking place simultaneously. Two of the conflicts concerned prize formation and followed the vertical chain in the book industry. The authors, publishers, and bookstores were allowed exemptions from the anti-monopoly laws of competition, and their interest organisations could negotiate binding agreements on fees and prices. Disagreement between the parties resulted in open conflicts, both between the bookstores and the publishers, and between the publishers and the authors.

The third line of conflict was horizontal, between different literatures. The non-fiction authors had for many years demanded access to the fiction scheme, but several proposals from the non-fiction organisations to use part of the pot for non-fiction had been defeated by the incumbent organisations in the field of literature. The fight became quite fierce. In 2001, Den Norske Forfatterforening (the fiction authors' union) described the demands from their non-fiction colleagues as a "declaration of war" (Fidjestøl, 2015: 24). This conflict among authors was only solved when the government established a scheme for non-fiction literature *in addition to* the existing fiction literature scheme (Bjerke et al., 2022). The result was a resettled and, for the time being, unified literary field.

Developments in the news media field, 2010–2022

In the years around 2010, three important changes in the surroundings of the two fields occurred. First, both fields were affected by digitalisation. The news industry lost their distribution monopoly through print and broadcast and had to see revenue from both ads and subscriptions drop dramatically. The revenue shortfall meant that the established media houses had to reduce

staffing, and most of them solved the problem by narrowing the coverage areas both geographically and thematically. Thus, geographical and thematic “blind spots” arose, which were partly covered up by new actors (Halvorsen & Bjerke, 2023).

In the literature field, a completely new digital product, the audiobook, distributed as a streaming service, entered the book market.

Secondly, the sectors were internationalised, and thirdly, the industry-controlled “internal governance units” were weakened as politics in these fields changed in favour of classical Weberian governance based on legal principles (Østerud et al., 2003).

Still, the period up to 2010 was characterised by few changes in news- and literary policy. The VAT exemption, and the main features of the press support and the purchasing schemes, prevailed. There were proposals for significant changes from within as well as from outside the field, but they were effectively countered in each of the two fields by their unified, well-organised internal governance units. On the other hand, it was evident that the incumbents were more efficient in defending the status quo than enacting change. Most attempts to increase the scope of the grants or extend the schemes to nearby genres failed.

In 2013, the conservatives won the national parliamentary election, and the Conservative Party and the Progress Party formed a government. Both parties have historically been sceptical towards state governance and funding of the cultural and media field. Thus, the stability in each of the two fields relied more than ever on the consensual relations between industry stakeholders. In the following, we discuss whether these external changes, in combination with the internal developments in the media policy, led to internal tensions and the weakening of “consensual relations” in the field of the news media.

Unlike what happened in many other countries, the incumbents in the news field were able to defend their position as the main news providers on the new Internet. The tabloids *VG* and *Dagbladet*, the public service broadcaster NRK, and the broadsheet *Aftenposten* have been the most important and most visited news websites throughout this century, where *VG* has over three million unique daily users as of 2022 (Olsen et al., 2021; Medietilsynet, 2021).

However, the two key public support schemes, the VAT exemption and the production grant, remained print based. VAT exemptions for digital editions were introduced as late as 2020. The industry was unified in their appeal to the authorities and claimed that the digital VAT was an important obstacle to innovation and the adaptation of new technology. A leading Schibsted official put it this way: “It has perhaps been the biggest victory the industry has achieved and has been very important for our ability to develop good solutions for digital subscriptions” (Interview with authors, 2021).

It is estimated that during 2010–2020, the major digital platforms took over 5 billion Norwegian kroner (approx. 438 million euro) in advertising

revenue from the Norwegian news media (Olsen et al., 2021). The Norwegian media field found a “common enemy” and appealed to the authorities to intervene against this enemy in the form of taxation or other regulations. At this point, however, the Norwegian media owners have so far achieved nothing but non-binding goodwill from changing governments. The head of the National Association of Media Companies typically put it this way:

Decisions made in Silicon Valley have democratic consequences for Norway and are totally exempt from democratic control and that affect our competitiveness. [...] I think the [authorities] have done an all-too-bad job. There are discussions in other European countries [...] that are much more aware of the issues between, for example, Facebook and the media. (Interview with authors, 2021)

Until 2013, The direct support schemes were also print based. The extent of the support was based on paid print editions and the number of printed editions per week.

The incumbents also lobbied for a long time to include the digital newspaper versions in the press support scheme. To achieve their goal, they appealed to the Norwegian authorities’ enthusiastic policy for digitalisation (Allern & Bjerke, 2018). After a consultation in 2012, the production support for newspapers was made “platform neutral”.

Platform neutrality created a potential threat to the privileged media firms. To prevent outsiders from the trade press qualifying for support, the requirement for content diversity was tightened. Still, old support practices trumped the wording of the regulations. Thus, certain niche media may qualify.

Due to changes in the income structure, the Norwegian trade press improved their relative strength vis-à-vis the mainstream news media. The heterogeneous group consists of around 1,500 titles, and 234 of them are members of *Fagpressen* [The Trade Press] with a total circulation of 3.9 million (Aker & Bjerke, 2023). The Trade Press has spent its resources on achieving VAT exemptions in line with the mainstream news media. This was partly catered for in 2020. Their new target is to be included in a support scheme for innovation. Still, despite their increased relative strength, their hope of being included in the production support scheme is modest. The chairman of The Trade Press, Per Brikt Olsen put it this way: “I think this scheme is so heavily rooted in custom, although if you look at the original you can start to question where it is now in many ways” (Interview with authors, 2021).

Until now, all recipients of direct support have been nationally controlled. The first non-Norwegian player to seek production grants was *Dagbladet*, which in 2013 was bought by the Danish weekly magazine group Aller. *Dagbladet.no*, like other national online newspapers, has a business model where most of the content is free, while some specialty material is put behind the paywall. *Dagbladet* has, as the only player with this model, applied

for production grants for the behind-paywall content. The application was rejected by the Media Authority, and Aller (*Dagbladet*) received almost no backing in the field for their attempt to gain support.

A new tendency is evolving political interest in the press support scheme. Based on a white paper on media policy, the allocation for press support was increased in 2020 such that support for the smallest local newspapers increased from 580,000 to 850,000 Norwegian kroner (approx. 51,000 to 74,000 euro) per publication per year. When the Ministry proposed a further strengthening of the smallest newspapers in 2022 at *the expense of* the so-called number-2 newspapers in the major cities, the field-wide agreement unravelled.

For now, however, it seems that these are the most important common perceptions: VAT exemption for the large productions and targeted subsidies for the small. The big actors accept production subsidies for their competitors because it ensures the legitimacy of their own VAT exemption and because they do not compete head-to-head with the support recipients. The strongest incumbent Schibsted said:

In this small country with a limited population base, there will be some thematic and geographical blind spots if one is not willing to spend state money on it, so we have a relatively pragmatic relationship to it. What we're most concerned about is that you don't just think about filling up in uncovered niches. It must also be borne in mind that direct press support for some selected titles can have a competitive effect. It's not a good thing in the long run. (Interview with authors, 2021)

The field consensus appears strong enough to thwart policy changes it does not support. Still, a unified performance is not necessarily enough to establish new privileges for the press. A committee was appointed by the government in 2015 and mandated to analyse the situation in the news media and propose measures. Seven of nine committee members worked in press or television. The committee drew up a rather dramatic crisis scenario for the news media and unanimously backed four proposals for a new support scheme. Of these, the most offensive was to remove employers' national insurance contributions (10.2%) temporarily for four years, and it was almost immediately shot down by politicians and not followed up on when the government presented a white paper the following year. The committee chairman, Knut Olav Åmås, stated:

The more we worked with the press support scheme, the more excited many of us became about what we saw – that in fact in these decades it has helped create a rich newspaper flora and media diversity in newspaper Norway. So that's why the conclusion we were left with, which was so disappointing for H [the Conservative Party] and FRP [the Progress Party], was that the press support is a success. It must continue in a modernised form. The modernisation we proposed was then to set the ceiling for the

largest beneficiaries, phased down to a maximum level over four years. This would go hand in hand with a general exemption from employer's national insurance contributions, which then had no impact. We probably had no idea there wasn't much realism in it, but we wanted to try. [...] In sum, we wanted to increase press support, but with a redistribution we believed would strengthen the legitimacy of the schemes. (Interview with authors, 2021)

In the white paper, the evolving interest in the field manifested itself in a proposition to establish an independent media support council that would determine the distribution of media support. The industry itself should *not* be represented (Norwegian Government, 2019). This proposal met fierce, unified opposition from the field, and the government later withdrew the proposal: "The input from several of the media actors themselves, the media field, media researchers and the interest organizations have been that this is something they do not want and something they believe is not necessary. We have chosen to listen to that", said liberal culture minister Abid Raja as he conceded (Aarli-Grøndalen, 2020).

This demonstrates that the unified news media field remains strong enough to prevent dramatic changes to regulation and support schemes, but they are not necessarily strong enough to establish new schemes, even in a situation with broad support for understanding the crisis. The consensual relations, both between the state and the industry and the intra-industry relations in the news media field, are still in function.

The literary field, 2010–2022

As discussed previously, the actors in the literary field solved their largest conflicts and reached a settlement in the early 2000s. A new standard agreement between the authors and the publishers was in place, while the non-fiction literature was incorporated into the purchasing scheme. Because of the newly won unity, most parts of the literary field took part in the defence of the purchasing scheme towards perceived threats around 2006. The Book Treaty also stood firm, and by the end of their reign, the Labour Party had even proposed replacing it with a new Book Act. In 2013, the Labour-led government was replaced by a Conservative-led government, which, in changing government constellations, would remain in power the following eight years. One could imagine that this would pave the way for neoliberal reforms in the book industry as well as in literary policy.

The change of government had two immediate consequences. The process of establishing a Book Act was stopped, and the budget to book a purchasing scheme was reduced by 10 million Norwegian kroner (approx. 876,000 euro). However, the governing parties did not make any important changes to the existing Book Treaty. Further, the budget cut represented less than 4

per cent of the total literature budget and was by no means dramatic. Several informants described it as a symbolic act, more than a change in the literary policy. One major reason for the small changes was that the parliamentary basis for the conservative-led government, which included the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party, did not allow for fundamental changes to the cultural policy.

Instead, the strongest attack on the Book Treaty came from the anti-trust-oriented Norwegian Competition Authority. Its main argument was and still is that the system of fixed prices on new books reduces the competition in the book market. In 2020, the Norwegian Competition Authority warned that it was considering imposing fines totalling 502 million Norwegian kroner (approx. 44 million euro) on four major publishers and the open book database company, Bokbasen, for having shared information about future book prices and the timing of book releases. This move could be interpreted as part of a major shift in the governance of literary policy.

In 2018, the government coalition was expanded to include the Liberal Party. The newcomer was awarded three state secretaries, including the Ministry of Culture, which was occupied by the party leader Trine Skei Grande. In an interview with Grande on 8 June 2021, she largely downplayed the significance of the Competition Authority move:

The Norwegian Competition Authority has been opposed to the Book Treaty since it was established. If you look at the history, one of the first things they attacked was the Book Treaty. Some believe that the Competition Authority was only established because of the Book Treaty. But they have always lost. I've participated in these recent negotiations. There's nothing that suggests they're about to win.

The secretary of culture also denied that any significant liberalisation of the literary policy had occurred during the period with a conservative-led government:

No, I don't see any sign of that. I think the Competition Authority thinks what they have always thought about this, but in vain. I have personally given the new minister of trade and industry [the outspoken conservative and experienced politician Torbjørn Røe Isaksen] a basic course in the Book Treaty. We drafted the proposals for a new Book Treaty together, with Torbjørn Røe Isaksen as minister of trade and industry and me as minister of culture, which we have sent to the stakeholders for consultation. I do not think this proposal represents changes in the logic of the literary policy. If you look at the consultation draft, both ministers have signed it. And we did it while the [populist] Progress Party was a part of the government.

Grande's description in this statement is supported by other sources.

In October 2021, the conservative-led government had to hand over government power to a new Labour Party-led government. In 2022, the new secretary of culture, representing the Labour Party, resumed work on replacing the current Book Treaty with a Book Act. Thus, we find that the policy towards, and regulation of, the book industry and other parts of the literary policy have changed little during this period.

On the other hand, another long-term trend in the Norwegian public administration – a stronger element of classical Weberian governance based on legal principles (Østerud et al., 2003) – has had some impact. In the field of literature, the changes occurred in small but steady footsteps. Since the 1990s, Arts Council Norway has evolved from being a council, deeply embedded in the field of art, to conducting typical administrative tasks on behalf of the government (Mangset & Hylland, 2017: 223). In the long term, this has given Arts Council Norway a character of being a cultural directorate (Fidjestøl, 2015). One informant with knowledge of the process describes the development as follows:

No one referred to the Arts Council Norway as a directorate 15 years ago, or even used the term directorate. Then someone started using the term directorate with “quote signs”, then more and more did it, and also without “quote signs”. Today we refer to ourselves as a directorate in writing as well as in daily speech.

There is more than semantics to this change. The distribution of support for literature (and other arts) has historically been made by stakeholder-appointed committees consisting of authors, publishers, and other field actors, who use artistic judgement of quality as their main assessment criterion. This model conflicts with a Weberian management logic that emphasises impartiality in member appointments and transparency in the form of criteria-based allocations. In 2015, several changes were made to the procurement schemes that reflect this logic. Most importantly, three criteria for literary quality were formulated while the literary organisations lost their right to appoint the members of the literary committees. In addition, members of the Publishers Association lost some of their previously held privileges compared with non-members.

The new management logic also improved the conditions for a new player in the book industry. In 2018, the Guild in the form of the Norwegian Writers' Association faced competition from the Norwegian Writers' Union. While the Writers' Association considers itself as a custodian of Norwegian literary quality, the Writers' Union works to improve the working conditions of all authors. Supported by the legal logic, the new trade union was able to get a substantial share of the state library compensation funds at the expense of the other literary organisations.

While the literary policy changed little during the period of conservative government, there were significant changes in the relations between the actors

in the field of literature. An important driving force was digitalisation, which provided a new product in the form of the e-book, with a large but far from realised commercial potential.

More importantly, digitalisation has provided the possibility of streaming audiobooks. The result is that a product, until recently only sold on CDs, gained a big boost. Streaming e-audiobooks is a market with strong growth, and it creates friction between the incumbent publishers Aschehoug, Gyldendal, and Cappelen Damm and many of the other actors in the field.

Aschehoug and Gyldendal owns the Norwegian streaming services Fabel, while Cappelen Damm owns the competitor Storytel. The competitive relationship between the two platforms represents one line of conflict. In addition, a conflict of interest has developed between the platform owners and the public libraries, which are prevented from buying many of the titles for library streaming. The conflict between publishers and public libraries has not yet been resolved.

In addition, there is a conflict between the platform owners and the other challenger publishers about the remuneration for streaming their literature. A similar conflict has developed between the authors and the publishers concerning the immaterial rights to digital publishing. The conflict among the platform owners, and between the platform owners and the other publishers, has resulted in many titles not being offered for streaming (Bjerke et al., 2022: 194).

The relationship between the platform owners and the authors is not sufficiently regulated in the standard contracts negotiated between the Norwegian Publisher Association and the Norwegian Writers' Association. This contractual grey area has resulted in episodes in which authors feel that they are being pressured by the publishers. Thus, authors are reluctant to enter into agreements with the publishers concerning the digital, immaterial rights to their books.

The transactional challenges coincide with a general tendency towards weakened relations between publishers and some authors. It has manifested itself in opportunistic behaviour from both sides. In some cases, publishers have paid authors a lesser part of the book sales than the contracts dictate, while a group of authors recently reclaimed their commercial rights to stream their older titles, on the grounds that the signed standard contracts oblige the publishers to release the book on [the obsolete] CD format.

In addition, new publishers are entering the book market with a predatory competitive mood. Some of them have recruited highly successful authors from incumbent publishers. Some of the most successful, such as the undisputed Norwegian bestseller Jørn Lier Horst, have even been rewarded for the “transfer” with ownership shares in their new publisher.

Even if the literary policy was remarkably stable during the conservative-led reign, the literary field is now facing a new episode of contention. There

are ongoing conflicts between the incumbent publishers and several other stakeholders in the field. Arguably, the field institution is far more contested today than it was during the last episode of contention around the turn of the millennium.

Discussion

The review above clearly demonstrates important similarities between the public support schemes for news media and literature, respectively. They were both introduced at approximately the same time, a time when democratic corporatist solutions were widespread and both fields were organised in close cooperation between the state and stakeholders in the field. News media and literature were both part of what Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) has called the Nordic media welfare state.

More than fifty years later, the most important parts of this system are still intact. Thus, the current situation in Norway differs from Jakobsson and colleagues' (2021) findings from Sweden: that the "consensual relation" between media companies and the state no longer characterises the media market. In Norway, the relations between the state and the companies seems relatively stable and predominantly supportive. On the other hand, intra industry tensions are rising, especially in the field of literature.

Both industries have VAT exemptions, the literature purchasing system exists with the same basic features proposed back in 1959, and it has also been expanded to new literary genres. The production subsidies for news media are still in function with the same purpose: to promote a varied press structure with the same basic structure. The scheme is adapted to digitalisation, and the emphasis of the political *rationale* has shifted from ideological diversity to geographical diversity. Eight years with bourgeois majority in the national parliament and various centre-right-wing governing coalitions have only led to marginal changes. Both fields have been able to comply with external proposals. The fields' incumbents and organisations still have a strong influence on the design and practice of the scheme, even though modern management logics with requirements for transparency and equal treatment are emerging. The incumbents in both fields have managed to defend privileges but to a lesser extent expand them.

Digitalisation has hit both industries with some disruptive consequences and allowed for the entrance of newcomers. In both fields, this poses a threat to the incumbents as well as the fields' stability. The two fields have responded very differently to the challenge. The established actors in the news media have closed ranks and managed to protect their privileges from outsiders and unwanted initiatives from the field of politics. The actors in the field of literature, on the other hand, face internal struggles that leave the field more vulnerable to newcomers and unwanted policy changes.

Our data demonstrate that the intra-field relations play an important role in creating these differences. While consensual relations remain intact in the field of news media, we find emerging cracks in the relational foundations of the literary field.

One important reason is that the book purchasing scheme has from the beginning favoured some types of literature (fiction) at the expense of others. In this aspect, the book purchasing scheme has some similarities with the Swedish system of redistribution, in which some newspapers were burdened with higher taxation (Jakobsson et al., 2021). Thus, both support schemes contain a manifest intra-industry conflict of interest.

Most importantly, the news field is more homogeneous and strongly institutionalised than the literature. This social order makes it easier to maintain intra-field consensual relations. The news media field is ideologically and culturally dominated by a strong journalistic profession with several unifying conceptions of control. The profession has two important professional organisations, Norsk Journalistlag [Norwegian Union of Journalists] and Norsk Redaktørforening [Association of Norwegian Editors]. Both organise close to 100 per cent of the country's journalists and editors. The Norwegian Union of Journalists is also part of the heavily instituted Norwegian system for industrial relations. The counterpart is Mediebedriftenes Landsforening [The National Association of Media Companies], which is a member of the joint Norwegian employers' organisation, and the relationship between the parties is regulated by a 100-year-old agreement, which in turn is part of the stately regulation of industrial relations through the Labour Disputes Act. Among other things, the act calls for *a duty of peace* except for annual wage negotiations, which are in turn overseen by a state-run national mediator. These relations are consequently part of a "governmental structure". Professional questions are left to the professional organisations and policy issues to the industry; the employer organisation is almost always completely aligned with editors and journalists. Typically, the National Association of Media Companies and the Association of Norwegian Editors have submitted almost identical consultation responses to the Government's proposal for changes to press support in 2022. Their responses were to a significant extent incorporated in the new support scheme.

According to a new Law of Press Support, the parliament in late 2022 also accepted a four-year stability plan for media regulations.

In the field of literature, the situation is quite different. The relationship between the literates and the publishers are not an ordinary worker-employer relation governed by the Labour Disputes Act. The authors are in principle self-employed individuals who enter into a trade agreement with the publishers. The negotiations between the Writers' Association and the Publishers' Association are conducted within an exception from competition legislation. This literary field is therefore more dependent on stable "consensual relations".

But this is made more difficult by the fact that field of literature is fragmented. It has far more organisations than the news media field: The Norwegian Association of Writers, The (new) Authors' Association, The Publishers Association, The Norwegian Translators' Association, the Norwegian Non-Fiction Writers and Translators Association, the Norwegian Association Translators, and two organisations for visual literates. Every one of these sub-fields has a different subculture; there is a great distance between the art dominate logic of the Writers' Association and the journalist-dominant logic of the non-fiction field (Halvorsen et al., 2020). Streamed audiobooks bring in a new art element (the actual reading of the text), a new genre, and a completely new kind of distribution. A less institutionalised field with many, partly competing organisations with different valuation hierarchies was subjected to a "shock" of digitalisation, and it seems obvious that the "conceptions of control" (Fligstein 2001: 32) have so far been too blurred and weak to make the field capable of resolving the issue.

A tentative conclusion is that the press support system will survive, while tensions in the more heterogenous and less organised field of literature pose a threat to the Norwegian literary welfare state.

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