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## INTERDISCIPLINARY AND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

### The free daily press in Europe 1995-2015

University of Lorraine, Metz, March 15 & 16, 2016

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

##### Context and issues

The event aims to promote an in-depth debate on a particular mass medium that has been circulating in cities for the past 20 years: the free daily newspaper. Created in Scandinavian countries in the mid-1990s it is today part of the everyday life of millions of Europeans. The free daily is a medium that reveals some characteristics of urban civilization, as the metropolitan penny press did in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They connect sources of information, reporters and readers all belonging to a city structured by dense and accelerating flows of people, capital, goods and ideas. This press will be discussed in terms of:

**Economics:** The definition of news content by the free dailies supposes the existence of a commercial deal in the city between publishers and advertisers together promoting paid-for items to an audience of readers-consumers. The success of this press consists in exploiting the resources of the free economy (Anderson, 2009) available in the everyday space of commuters who give a certain functional and ideational value to a series of paid-for goods; the importance of the exclusively local advertisers who depend on the press model chosen by publishers (Eveno, Sonnac, 2006). At the same time, the commercial profits made by this press depend above all on the inserts put into their print runs since the advertising resources available in cyberspace have been far less interesting than the traditional press. However, the growing role of the Internet as a source of information and consumption can consequently put the economic model of the free press at risk in the coming years.

- How can we describe the current commercial city that secures the existence of the free dailies circulated in the metropolises?
- Do these global dailies stay in tune with nomadic urbanites searching for the same items and commercial brands in a standardized city of flows?

- Can the economic model of the free press survive the increasing dematerialization of information access and commercial advertising in the city?
- Free dailies are said to be alive and kicking in the United States (Tennant, 2014) but their circulation is decreasing in Europe and especially so, in their place of birth: The Nordic countries (Bakker, 2013). Have the free dailies, in contrast to the early 2000s (Picard, 2001), become far less strategic to publishers looking for commercial resources in the metropolis?

**Journalism:** the relatively recent development of the communication industries has led to the exponential growth of people trained for media careers. However, professionals willing to work for newspapers have to face the hard economic reality of this sector (Charon, 2005; Le Floch, Sonnac, 2005). Journalists recruited by the free dailies symbolize the transformation of a profession which is more and more structured around economic norms that puts its agents into a rather standardized service economy with people consuming news on one side and professionals catering to this consumer demand on the other (Lemieux, 2011). Commercial journalism and its *infotainment* agenda have been accused of damaging the norms and values of a profession considered as a pillar of democracy.

- The free press is based on commercial journalism. However, are the professional routines of the free daily journalists different from their colleagues employed in the traditional paid press?
- Are these journalists and their information sources looked down upon by the rest of the profession?
- Do they still belong to the journalistic profession or are they mere economic agents separate from the rest of the media sphere?

**Representation of the city:** One of the most important columns in these newspapers is dedicated to the events taking place in the city lived in by their readers. These events are considered as information able to engage the interest of commuters. A large number of the journalists will be allocated to chasing what is happening in their metropolises. As a functional press, free dailies dispense practical information such as the closure of roads, weather forecasts or the local cinema programme. But they also mention political, economic and social issues in a changing urban territory made of structuring networks and evolving boundaries. Bad news is normally good news for capturing the interest of readers. At the same time, media living off commercial adverts ought normally to put their public in a positive “buying mood” (Bagdikian, 2000:138).

- What are the routinized representations of the city, as defined by these journalists that are able to attract hundreds of thousands of urban readers on a daily basis?
- Is the representation of urban life in free newspapers different from that in the paid press?
- Do the reporters draw their audience into a metropolitan hyper-reality “à la Baudrillard” favouring mass consumption?
- Do they determine an agenda that supports a public-private “growth coalition” (Logan, Molotch, 2002:469) considering the city above all as a place for economic opportunities and commercial bargains in-between the news and various territorial marketing policies?

- If reporters tend to portray the city as a place of bad news, a place of fears and crimes, what are the main dangers facing the urbanites and why would reporters insist on these issues?
- Can free dailies be assimilated to the popular and paid tabloid press?
- It is easy to consider free dailies insignificant for the development of a democratic public sphere compared to the quality papers. However, is this necessarily the case? Do they not continue the function played a century ago by the popular press as a tool for structuring “democratic market societies” (Schudson, 1978:22)?

**Practice in the city:** The format of free metropolitan newspapers has been conceived to attract nomadic people who have only a few minutes of their attention to devote to the news when offered on their way to their destination, or at their destination during a short break. Free dailies are included in a series of routines not associated with the media sphere. Media practices interact with a series of other social practices in which some overlap with others (Couldry, 2004, 2011). It is consequently important to take into consideration the web of practices that determine how the content of free dailies is received, interpreted and used in the city by multifarious readers interacting in different social environments. Anderson (1983) considered the silent reading of the daily press in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a ritual that contributed to the definition of imagined national communities.

- What sort of rituals and gratifications are linked to the reading of free dailies?
- What sort of imagined and real communities can be related to this press in the new multicultural and pluralistic metropolises?
- Free newspapers are often said to be the medium of the young generation by their promoters. There is research that shows the attraction of these dailies to this generation (Rieffel, 2010). However, they are also used by a highly diverse public, including immigrant communities and disadvantaged economic classes who occupy a marginal position in the city from a social and geographical point of view (Wadbring, 2007; Straw, 2010). How do peripheral urban groups in the city use this press? Can the free dailies be a tool for organising their claims in late-modern metropolises?

## Calendar

Abstracts must reach [audrey.alves@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:audrey.alves@univ-lorraine.fr), [loic.ballarini@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:loic.ballarini@univ-lorraine.fr) and [christian.lamour@liser.lu](mailto:christian.lamour@liser.lu) by **30 November 2015**. They must be written in English or in French (a maximum of 3000 characters including spaces). They should indicate the name, surname, email address, professional status and the institution of the researcher. There will be a double blind peer review. The decision of the Scientific Committee will be given by **15 of December 2015**

The conference will take place on **15 and 16 March 2016** at the University of Lorraine, in Metz. The presentation will last 20 minutes. English and French will be the two languages of the conference. Registration fees will be 90 € (paid at the beginning of the conference) except for students who will be able to attend for free. Following the conference, a book or a special issue in a peer-reviewed journal including the research presented will be edited. The finalised articles will be expected by **30 June 2016**. They will be double blind reviewed.

## Scientific Committee

Audrey Alvès, University of Lorraine, France

Piet Bakker, University of Applied Research Utrecht, Netherlands

Loïc Ballarini, University of Lorraine, France

Nick Couldry, London School of Economics, United Kingdom

François Demers, Laval University of Quebec, Canada

Annick Dubied, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Patrick Eveno, University of Paris 1, France

Benoît Grevisse, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium

Christian Lamour, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, Luxembourg

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Will Straw, McGill University of Montreal, Canada

Ingela Wadbring, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

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