

Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe (MediaAcT)

D18: Media Index for MAS in the participating countries

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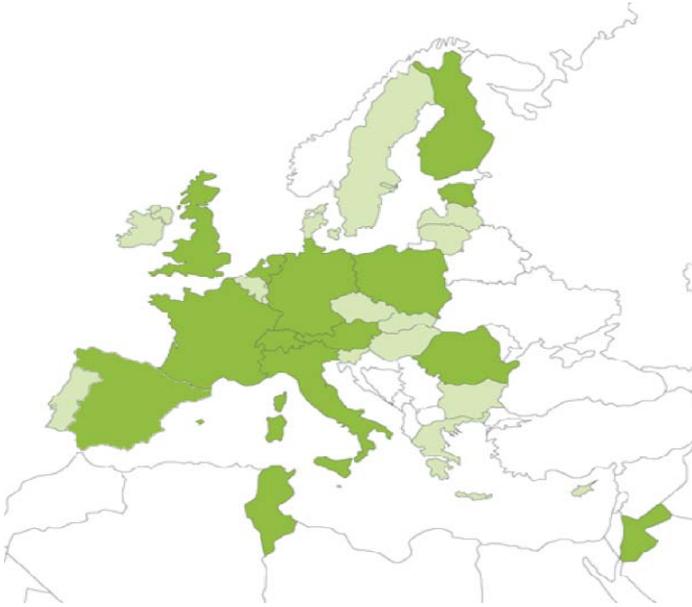
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Dissemination Level

PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

The project MediaAcT

The research project "Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe" (MediaAcT) examines media accountability and transparency in twelve Eastern and Western European states as well as two Arab countries.



The project analyzes the development and impact of established media accountability instruments (e.g. press councils, codes of ethics) as well as new media accountability instruments emerging in the Internet (e.g. media criticism in blogs). The project is a joint interdisciplinary effort of a team of 14 partners from Eastern and Western Europe as well as from the Arab World, using a multi-method approach (survey, desk studies and expert interviews) for the analysis. MediaAcT receives funding of approximately 1.5 million Euro from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme and has a duration of 3 1/2 years, starting in February 2010.

For further details on the project, news and outcomes please visit <http://www.mediaact.eu>

Introduction

The quality of media accountability in a country serves as one key indicator for media pluralism and media freedom. Claude-Jean Bertrand, one of the pioneers in international comparative media accountability research, defined media accountability systems resp. instruments as “any non-State means of making media responsible towards the public.”¹ Other definitions include co-regulatory tools as well. This does not, however, mean state interference, but clear frames for responsible media, financial support for press councils, or other financial subsidies bound to ethical regulations.

As part of its research, the MediaAcT consortium has developed a media accountability index as a tool to regularly monitor the status quo of media accountability in EU member states, and furthermore in candidate countries. The media accountability instruments considered in this index help observing media developments in terms of media ethics and responsibility towards multiple stakeholders. Journalism and its production of a (informative, entertaining and advertising) public sphere bring along a special responsibility of media companies as they have certain society privileges and should be orientated towards the common good. Especially in times of “big media” resp. economic changes (digitalization, convergence, web 2.0 etc.) and media concentration, an index as such helps monitoring the state-of-the-art of the media accountability infrastructures in EU member states, highlights deficits in a country’s media system and identifies benchmark countries. Furthermore, this index can show decision makers the state-of-the-art of EU candidate countries in the process of accession talks. The status quo of media accountability as one key indicator of media freedom helps to evaluate the situation of freedom of expression in these countries (other key indicators and how to include them can be found in point 2).

The MediaAcT media accountability index also pays tribute to the policy recommendations recently issued by the High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism. The report of the group concludes that free and pluralistic media systems are a key factor to sustain European democracy. The recommendations state: „All EU countries should have independent media councils with a politically and culturally balanced and socially diverse membership. (..) Such bodies would have competences to investigate complaints, much like a media ombudsman, but

¹ Bertrand, Claude-Jean (2000): Media Ethics & Accountability Systems. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers. 108.

would also check that media organizations have published a code of conduct and have revealed ownership details, declarations of conflicts of interest, etc. Media councils should have real enforcement powers” and “should follow a set of European-wide standards and be monitored by the Commission to ensure that they comply with European values.“ The report also suggest that the EU “could establish an independent monitoring center, ideally as part of academia, which would be partially funded by the EU but would be fully independent in its activities.“²

The index the MediaAcT team proposes can serve as an important instrument in following these recommendations:

- It monitors the activities of media professionals and media organizations in EU countries, as the index evaluates the status quo of media accountability in EU member states.
- It enables decision-makers to create a ranking in order to find country-specific deficits – where media policy makers might wish to set incentives to improve the situation – and best practice countries – which might serve as a model and “laboratory” for successful media accountability practices.
- Furthermore, the index can also be used as an instrument in order to set up a European standard in the field of media accountability expected for example from ascending countries.

The instruments and practices evaluated in this index, online or offline alike, create transparency on different levels: news production, ownership, working conditions, sources etc. They contribute to public debates on media freedom and editorial independence by opening up the journalistic process of selecting and framing news. The analyzed tools also help citizens to participate in this process of news production. Furthermore, these instruments help the audience reflecting their own media consumption and the process of opinion-making.

As a result, these instruments are a major prerequisite for pluralistic media in a functioning democracy, and they are important for strengthening the media’s position as the fourth estate. As Bertrand defines, these tools help to “improve the services of the media to the public; restore the prestige of media in the eyes of the population; diversely protect freedom of speech and press;

² Viķe-Freiberga, Vaira; Däubler-Gmelin, Herta; Hammersley, Ben; Poiares Pessoa Maduro, Luís Miguel (2013): A free and pluralistic media to sustain European democracy. Accessed January 28, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/media_taskforce/doc/pluralism/hlg/hlg_final_report.pdf 7.

obtain, for the profession, the autonomy that it needs to play its part in the expansion of democracy and the betterment of the fate of mankind”.³

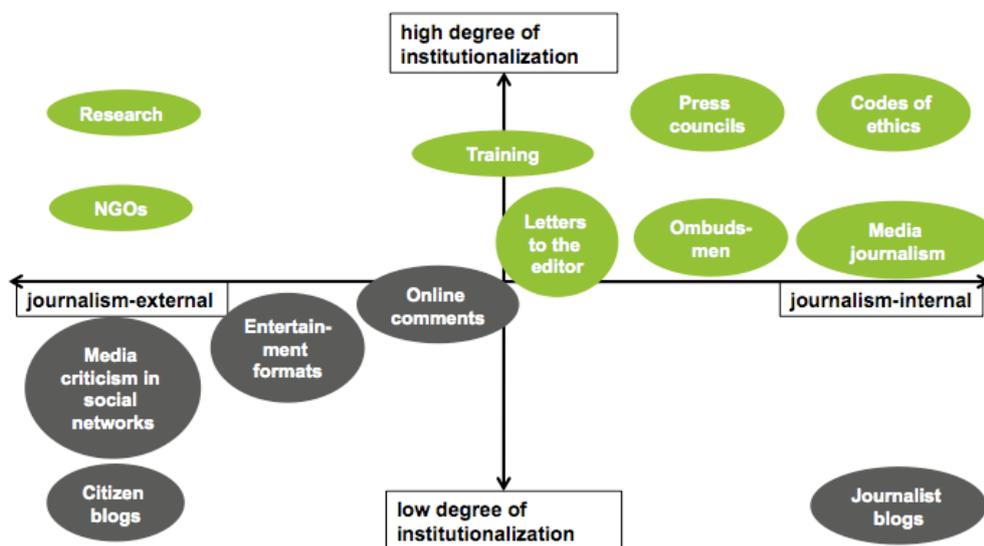
One major goal in the creation of this index is repeatability, as we suggest measuring the status quo of media accountability across countries on an annual or bi-annual basis. Therefore this index also includes emerging practices of online media accountability which will most likely gain more power in the near future. In order to facilitate tracking of the development of media accountability structures in different countries, we suggest updating and repeating the index in regular intervals by a coordinating institution.

A regular monitoring of media accountability structures in EU states – as well as in candidate countries and countries beyond Europe – will allow media policy makers to better assess the state-of-the-art of media accountability of each country and help to base policy decisions upon solid evaluation. Moreover, it will stimulate a discussion about media accountability practices among media professionals on a European and national level. The media coverage achieved by an index as such will increase awareness of media accountability issues among viewers and readers. Similar to the Reporters without Borders annual press freedom index, the EU Index of Media Accountability will generate responsiveness across borders. To guarantee the highest level of transparency and accessibility the EU Index of Media Accountability will be promoted by a manageable publication (e.g. as a free download “Green Book Media Accountability”).

³ Bertrand, Claude-Jean (2000): *Media Ethics & Accountability Systems*. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers. 151.

MediaAcT: Instruments, practices and journalists' perception

The MediaAcT research consortium has collected over one hundred practices and instruments of media accountability through desk research and qualitative studies. After analyzing and identifying the most important and promising ones, the research consortium created a typology of media accountability practices, distinguishing between their degree of institutionalization within the journalistic profession or news organizations (high versus low), and by their position as internal or external tools in journalism.



MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENTS INSIDE JOURNALISM – HIGH DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Ombudsman: Is usually a senior editor within a media organization taking audience complaints and following up on them with the respective journalists. Complaints regarding the practices of news media can also be reported by the general public to the ombudsman in a regular column.

Regulatory Authority/Agency for Media (Broadcasting, Newspapers, Online Outlets): Organizations that preside and regulate the media market both from the economic point of view (transparency in the property, concentration), and from the point of view of content.

Press Council: A voluntary organization, funded jointly by newspaper publishers and journalists' federations, taking complaints from the public about specific pieces of journalism and seeking to maintain high standards of ethics in journalism.

Journalists' associations dealing with media accountability: Journalists' associations exist in each country. They generally deal with journalists' rights but they sometimes also regulate and supervise journalists' duties and values (e.g. Ordine Nazionale dei Giornalisti in Italy).

Media/Journalism trade journals: Trade journals regularly report on topics of ethics in journalism.

Continuing education/mid-career programs for journalists: Journalists should have the chance to attend mid-career courses on accountability and transparency.

Professional code of ethics (country level) and internal code of ethics (company level): Set of guidelines which overview journalists' practices, to be established either at country level (as a self-regulation agreement between the journalists' and publishers' association) or at the company level (as an agreement within the organization). Codes help media practitioners to manage their workflow in accordance with ethical standards and values.

Transparent correction management: Media companies should foresee ways to communicate their mistakes occurring during the production phase. Several online instruments, like for example corrections buttons, have emerged in past years; see for an overview the MediaAcT Best Practice Guidebook on www.mediaact.eu.

Style book: Some media organizations provide a style book as a set of rules and conventions on specific ethical issues.

Published mission papers/mission statement: Some media organizations resp. journalists' federations publish mission papers online, stating the political, ideological and religious principles of the federation resp. media organization.

MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENTS INSIDE JOURNALISM – LOW DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Fixed complaint procedures: Media companies can offer their users a set way to dispute and criticize news items. Sometimes media companies provide an email addresses for complaint, use the ombudsperson to address complaints, or have an own complaints' division.

Research processes made transparent (e.g. deep links): News organizations can make use of the Internet to lay open their sources to the audience (e.g.: public relation material, deep links to original sources).

Specifying which news agencies are used as sources: The production of traditional and online media more and more resorts to the use of news agencies. Media companies should use these sources in a transparent way by quoting them.

Company editorial guidelines made public: Publication of internal guidelines, online or offline.

Guidelines are part of the employment agreement/employment contract: When media companies hire journalists they can ask them to sign an agreement contract where rules and ethical standards are stated; thus, the code of ethics becomes part of the employment contract.

Internal critique session: Generally news media have editorial meetings where journalists discuss about the next and past broadcasts/editions. Internal critique sessions are meetings specially meant to discuss mistakes and problems of the already produced output.

Public critique session: Some newsrooms publicly discuss media accountability issues with their audience, also via the Internet.

Media page/media journalism as an own beat: Especially quality media often run media pages, which ideally also cover media (self-)criticism, media accountability issues and media transparency.

Legal department/media lawyer: Media companies should have a legal department also dealing with media accountability issues.

Providing a contact to journalists: Media professionals can provide a personal e-mail or other ways to be contacted by their users and thus foster actor transparency.

Letters to the editor: Can be considered as an accountability instrument if the editor also publishes letters dealing with ethical issues in journalism.

Social Media: Journalists regularly engaging in social media activities to foster actor and/or production transparency, as well as media accountability.

News websites' space for user's comments: Discussion forums and/or space given underneath an article to allow audience comments and discussion.

MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENTS OUTSIDE JOURNALISM – HIGH DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Advisory council consisting of users: Media companies can invite users to give feedback in a plenary session or in feedback meeting, e.g. by inviting them to the news company's office.

Consumer groups related to media: User groups watching and reflecting media content, or concerned with media accountability issues.

Media-related NGO or foundations: Media NGOs like Reporters without Borders regularly observe and publish also on ethical issues in journalism.

Media observatory: Research institutions continuously monitoring media accountability and media transparency.

Periodical reports by media scholars or observatories: Universities, individual scholars, external research institutes or independent observatories can publish regular reports on media accountability and transparency issues and thus foster the accountability debate.

Media education at school: Media education resp. media literacy programs in primary and secondary school.

Courses in media ethics as part of journalism education: Journalism students have to attend courses in media ethics during their education.

Courses in media (ethics) at university: Academic courses on media ethics/literacy at university for a larger public.

MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY OUTSIDE JOURNALISM – LOW DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Media satire shows/reports: In some countries, popular TV programs, newspapers and online editions have regular media satire shows/reports or do shows that regularly deal satirically with media issues.

Academic media watch websites/blogs: Blogs written by academics or an academic institution discussing media accountability and transparency on a meta-level.

Activists' media watch websites/blogs: Refers to media watch blogs or media watch websites dealing regularly with media topics.

Social media activities from the audience concerned with media accountability: Audience-driven Facebook groups resp. regularly used hash tags dealing with media accountability and transparency.

Indices in the field of media and journalism

While the MediaAcT media accountability index is designed to provide policy-makers with an overview over the status quo of media accountability, it may also be used alongside with already existing media indices results, which focus mostly on the macro level.

Press Freedom Index, Reporters without Borders:

This expert index is published each year and measures the state of media freedom, focusing on press freedom violations and pressure on journalists (physical violations, murder, financial pressure etc.), as well as censorship and media control. Media accountability topics are very briefly tackled in this index. A score and a position are assigned to each country in the final ranking.

<http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html>

Freedom of the Press, Freedom House:

Is an analytical report with numerical ratings for 196 countries conducted since 1980. Countries are given a total score from 0 (best rating) to 100 (worst rating) on the basis of a set of 23 questions. They are divided into three subcategories: legal environment (focusing media law), political environment (focusing on state authorities and right of information) and on the economic environment (focusing on the financial situation of media companies and production conditions for journalism). It does not deal with media accountability.

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press>

UNESCO Media Development Index, UNESCO:

This is a one-time paper produced for the International Programme for the Development of Communication of UNESCO, looking at the legal and policy framework for media and at infrastructural questions. It also considers the development of community media and human resources development in the field of journalism across countries.

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/media-development-indicators-a-framework-for-assessing-media-development/>

Independent Study on “Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States – towards a risk-based approach”, K.U. Leuven – ICRI (lead contractor):

This index was prepared so far only once for the European Commission (Directorate-General Information Society and Media) and has primarily a look at laws and regulations which are relevant in the area of ownership/control, editorial independence, media, cultural and political pluralism.

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/media_taskforce/doc/pluralism/study/final_report_09.pdf

Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International:

Regular index on corruption. While the index does not explicitly deal with media, it helps to identify the specific national framework for media companies.

<http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview>

Description of the MediaAcT Media Accountability Index

This index was designed in a multi-step proceeding.

- In a first step, the teams involved collected media accountability instruments to be found in Europe, the United States and beyond through desk research.
- In a second step, the authors analyzed media accountability practices existing in the countries involved in the MediaAcT research project.
- In a third step, already existing media indices were analyzed; the authors defined benchmarks, distilled useful procedures and had a look at pitfalls and criticism raised against existing indices.

After a process of evaluation and discussion, a preliminary version of the index has been pre-tested. Experts from 14 countries filled in the index questionnaire and gave feedback on the composition of items and the manageability of the index in their country. After the pre-testing and slightly re-designing, a final version was composed.

The index seeks to list the existing instruments in each country, and to consider their efficiency. Therefore the index considers both the existence of media accountability instruments on the meso level (referring to the newsrooms, e.g.: “Internal code of ethics at company level”) and the micro level (related to the daily journalists’ routines, e.g.: “Is there a way to contact the journalists?”). For a more detailed description of this approach, see the MediaAcT project’s publication “Best Practice Guidebook. Media Accountability and Transparency Across Europe”.⁴ The index also covers various levels of transparency that are at stake in the production of news (source transparency, e.g. specification of news agencies, process transparency, e.g. publication of mission papers, and actor transparency, e.g. existence of internal critique sessions). The five groups of indicators are being completed by three questions regarding the general media system in order to cover the macro level. More subcontext concerning the macro level of the media system in a given country is already available through other indices as listed in the previous chapter. To complete the index, four items related to the interaction between journalists and audiences were included.

⁴ Bichler, Klaus, Haliki Harro-Loit, Matthias Karmasin, Daniela Kraus, Epp Lauk, and Urmas Loit (2012): Best Practice Guidebook. Media Accountability and Transparency Across Europe. Accessed November 11. 2012. http://www.mediaact.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Guidebook/guidebook.pdf.

Scope of analysis

In order to provide an index tool manageable to the expert panel involved in assessing the situation of media accountability in a given country, the MediaAcT media accountability index takes a reduced number of media into consideration: The sample puts the focus on the five major players in each media segment, as they shape the market, and their content reaches a majority of media consumers. The MediaAcT media accountability index therefore focuses on the analysis of the five leading media organizations in each segment in a given country in terms of circulation: the **five best-selling newspapers**, the **five TV news broadcasts with the highest viewership**, as well as the **five most important news website** in terms of audience size. Indeed, in Germany for example the **five best-selling newspapers** (nationwide) cover 50% of the nationwide newspapers even without analyzing the very fragmented local daily newspaper market (Bundesverband Deutscher Zeitungsverleger e.V. 2011)⁵. Furthermore, in 2011 the three major news broadcasts in Germany already had a market share of 65% (ARD 2011)⁶. Also the **five most important news websites** in Germany reached more than half of the population (Statista 2012).⁷

The Scale

After analyzing the already existing indices in terms of complexity, usability for experts, but also for decision-makers, as well as in terms of precision, the MediaAcT media accountability index works with a Likert scale from 0 to 5. The template offers a list of both online and offline media accountability instruments as well as questions regarding the media systems. Experts filling in the template will evaluate their efficacy in terms of accountability and transparency.

- 0 = the instrument does not exist or does not apply to my country;
- 1 = it is not effective in terms of accountability and transparency;

⁵ Bundesverband Deutscher Zeitungsverleger e.V. (2012): Die deutschen Zeitungen in Zahlen und Daten. Auszug aus dem Jahrbuch „Zeitungen 2011/12“. Accessed November 11. 2012.

http://www.bdzv.de/fileadmin/bdzv_hauptseite/markttrends_daten/wirtschaftliche_lage/2011/assets/ZahlenDaten_2011.pdf

⁶ ARD (2011): Tagesschau klarer Marktführer bei Fernsennachrichten - höchste Zuschauerzahl auch bei 14- bis 49jährigen. Accessed November 11. 2012. <http://www.ard.de/intern/archiv/tagesschau-marktfuehrer/-/id=2235058/nid=2235058/did=2305240/1xfdy9s/index.html>

⁷ Statista (2012): Top 10 Nachrichtenseiten nach Nettoreichweite im Oktober 2012 in Unique Usern (in Millionen). Accessed November 11. 2012. <http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/165258/umfrage/reichweite-der-meistbesuchten-nachrichtenwebsites/>

- 2 = it has a low impact in terms of accountability and transparency;
- 3 = it has a moderate impact in terms of accountability and transparency;
- 4 = it has a high impact in terms of accountability and transparency;
- 5 = it has a major efficacy and impact in terms of accountability and transparency.

Score

The index foresees a minimum score of 0 (total absence of any media accountability instrument) and a maximum score of 200 (presence of all kinds of media accountability instruments and highest level of efficacy).

Pre-test results

The results from the index pre-test can be found in the table below; the pilot index provides a ranking for the countries involved in the MediaAcT research project (filled in by one expert in each country). The preliminary results give a good overview of the state of the art of media accountability in Europe and can demonstrate the usability of the MediaAcT media accountability index.

MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY RANKING	
SWITZERLAND	112
FINLAND	109
THE NETHERLANDS	104
GERMANY	102
UNITED KINGDOM	98
AUSTRIA	93
ROMANIA	89
ITALY	84
FRANCE	84
POLAND	78
ESTONIA	74
JORDAN	33
TUNISIA	29

200 – 150: Countries with a highly-developed MA System

149-100: Countries with a developed MA System

99-50: Countries with a partly developed MA System

49-0: Countries with an underdeveloped MA System

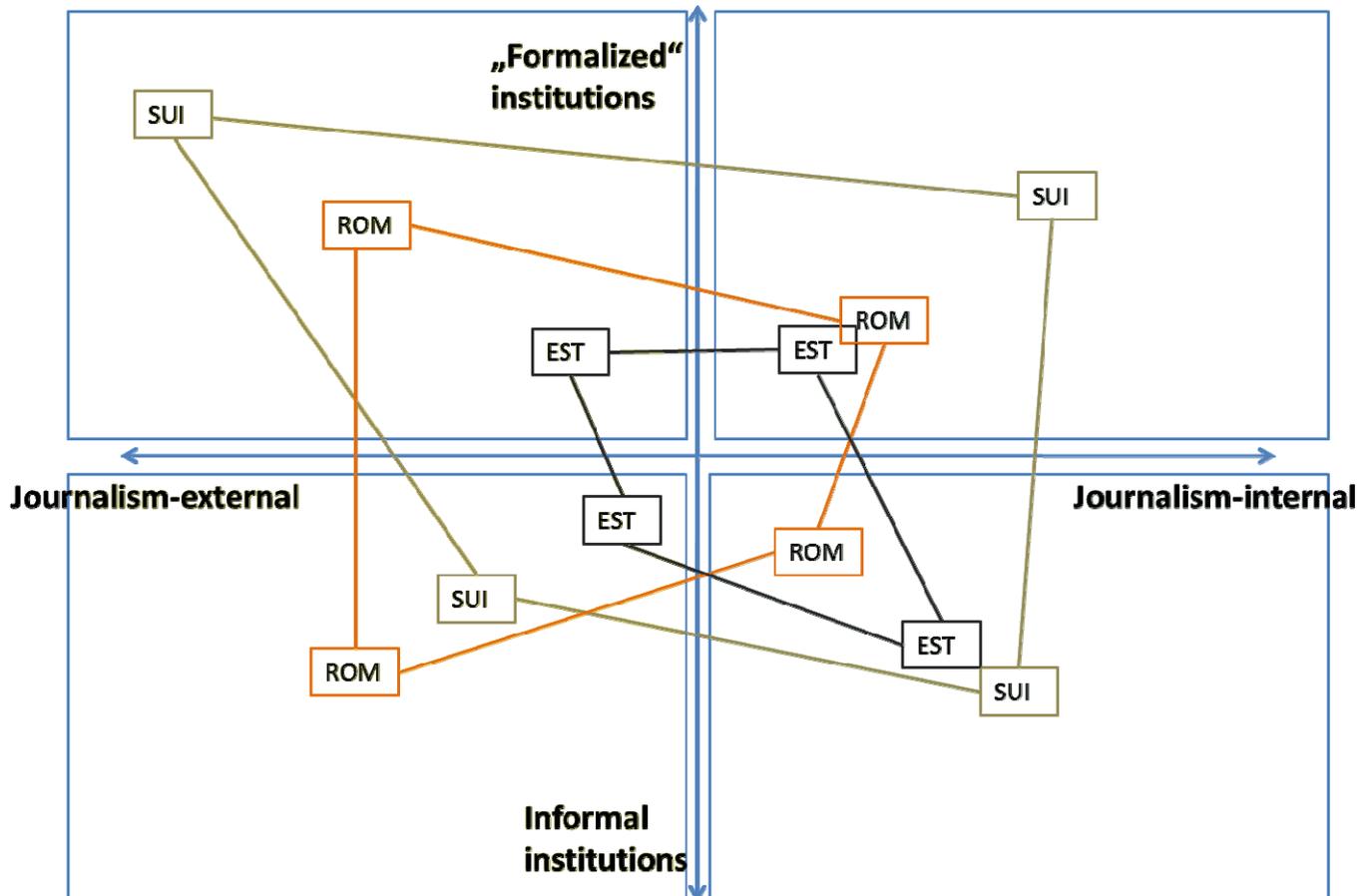
Although the media landscapes are quite different in the 13 MediaAcT countries, with heterogeneous societies, media cultures, and political cultures, the index obviously allows an identification of benchmark countries in terms of media accountability and points out factors fostering successful accountability practices. For example, those countries with press councils who have a relatively high prestige among the news media and who are rather open to civil society (Finland, Germany, The Netherlands etc.) rate much better in the index than countries with weak press councils like Austria (re-established only in 2010) or Estonia, where we find two press councils, neither of them having much authority among the media organizations.⁸

The validity of the index is also supported by the data from the comparative journalists' survey done by the MediaAcT team; indeed, the index correlates with our survey data. For example, 75% of Swiss journalists (fully) support the idea of news outlets publishing a code of ethics, but only 41,5% of Estonian journalists do so. In the index, Switzerland is ranked number one, Estonia number eleven. Similar results can be found concerning the publication of a mission statement: 79% of Finnish journalists consider this is a good idea, while only 35,9% of French journalists support this idea (fully). The results are again reflected by the index, ranking Finland in second place, while France can be found on the ninth place. The survey data furthermore show that journalists from countries with widely accepted press councils like Finland think that these instruments have a higher impact on journalism (79% in Finland compared to 20,4% in Austria).

The MediaAcT media accountability index furthermore allows not only ranking countries according to the quality of their media accountability infrastructures. As illustrated in the axis model on the following page (with examples from the pilot index), the MediaAcT index can also distinguish between countries with sufficient journalism-internal and highly institutionalized media accountability instruments like for example Switzerland, and countries which have only few or no journalism-internal and institutionalized media accountability instruments, and thus need to rely on journalism-external instruments with a low degree of institutionalization which supposedly have less of an impact on the quality of journalism, like for example Romania. Estonia lacks instruments from all four different fields and would probably benefit largely from

⁸ Lauk, Epp; Denton, Marcus (2011): Assessing Media Accountability – in Europe and Beyond. In: Eberwein, Tobias; Fengler, Susanne; Lauk, Epp; Leppik-Bork, Tanja (Hg.): Mapping Media Accountability - in Europe and Beyond. Köln. Halem. pp.217-228. pp. 207-210

an investment into its media accountability infrastructure. Media practitioners and media policy-makers alike could use the MediaAcT index axis model to decide whether specific countries would require incentives in order to improve their media accountability structure.



Indicators

MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: please rate on a scale from 0 (the element does not exist) to 5 (the element has a major efficacy and impact in terms of accountability and transparency)		
	1. Does the constitution contain warranties that provide transparency for the media system?	
	2. Is information on media company ownership accessible and available?	
	3. Is the management of the public service broadcasting transparent and free from political power?	

DO THIS SET OF MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENTS EXIST IN YOUR COUNTRY (WHETHER COMPULSUORY OR NOT)? Please rate on a scale from 0 (the instrument does not exist) to 5 (the instrument has a major efficacy and impact in terms of accountability and transparency)		
HIGH DEGREES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION	1. Ombudsman	
	2. Regulatory Authority/Agency for Media (Broadcasting, Newspapers, Online Outlets) exist	
	3. Press Council	
	4. Journalist associations dealing with media accountability	
	5. Media/Journalism trade journals	
	6. Continuous education for journalists	
	7. General Code of ethics (Country level)	
	8. Internal Code of ethics (Company level)	
	9. Transparent correction management	
	10. Style book	
	11. Published mission papers/mission statement	
	12. Published news policy document	

COULD YOU TELL IF IN THE MOST IMPORTANT NEWROOMS DO THESE PRACTICES EXIST? Please rate on a scale from 0 (the practice does not exist) to 5 (the practice has a major efficacy and impact in terms of accountability and transparency)		
LOW DEGREES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION	1. Research processes made transparent (e.g. deep links)	
	2. Company editorial guidelines are made public	
	3. Fixed complaint procedures	
	4. Guidelines are part of the employment agreement/employment contract	
	5. Internal critique session	
	6. Specifying which news agencies are used as sources	
	7. Legal department/media lawyer	
	8. Media page/media journalism as a own beat	
	9. Public critique session	
ONLINE AND OFFLINE INTERACTION Please rate on a scale from 0 (the instrument does not exist) to 5 (the instrument has a major efficacy and impact in terms of accountability and transparency)		
	1. Is there a way to contact the journalists?	
	2. Do letters to the editor exist?	
	3. Are there regularly social media activities from journalists concerned with media accountability?	
	4. Do news websites provide space for user's comments?	

OUTSIDE JOURNALISM Please rate on a scale from 0 (the instrument does not exist) to 5 (the instrument has a major efficacy and impact in terms of accountability and transparency)		
HIGH DEGREES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION	1. Is there an “advisory council” consisting of users?	
	2. Do consumer groups related to media exist?	
	3. Do academics or observatories produce periodically critical books or reports?	
	4. Does a media observatory exist?	
	5. Do media-related NGOs, Foundations or no profit research exist?	
	6. Is media education generally taught at school?	
	7. Are courses in media (ethics) well established at universities?	
	8. Is media ethics part of journalism education?	
LOW DEGREES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION	1. Do media satire shows/reports exist?	
	2. Do academic media watch websites/blogs exist?	
	3. Do activist media watch websites/blogs exist?	
	4. Do regular social media activities from the audience concerned with media accountability exist?	

Disclaimer:

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