PUBLIC JOURNALISM AND PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PUBLIC SPHERES AS CONTEXTS OF PROFESSIONALISM

LAURA RUUSUNOKSA

Abstract

This article provides an insight into the public journalism discussion and offers a way of understanding how journalists at local, regional and national levels interpret and practise public journalism slightly differently. Journalists' interpretations of participatory public journalism initiatives in three Finnish newspapers from local, regional and national public spheres are used as a point of departure for discussing professionalism in journalism. The paper argues that professionalism offers a way to articulate journalists' relations to the market, administration and the public in different ways in different public spheres.

Laura Ruusunoksa is a doctoral student at the University of Tampere, Finland, email: laura.ruusunoksa@uta.fi.

Public journalism or civic journalism has been a loosely organised reform movement aimed at getting the press to rethink its commitment to the ideals of democratic participation (Glasser and Lee 2002, 203). Public journalism has been developed in the United States in 1990s and since then the ideas have also been applied outside North America. In this article I will examine public journalism from a specific point of view. I will consider the ways in which journalists and editors in three Finnish newspapers from three different public spheres – local, regional and national – interpret the "civic turn" in their working environment. By civic turn I refer to the changes and developments that have led to the public journalism projects in the newspapers. The term does not imply a total shift in the newsroom practices, but rather a shift of awareness of the problematic relationship between media, civic life and the public sphere (Dahlgren 2006).

The newspapers studied are from national, regional and local levels of the Finnish media field. The aim is to examine these newspapers and their public journalism approaches in relation to the public spheres in which they act. The public sphere is here understood as being divided into fluid and overlapping sub-spheres which are in continuous interplay with each other (Fraser 1992).

Public journalism as an attempt to rethink journalism is also an attempt to rethink journalistic professionalism. Journalists' interpretations of the civic turn illuminate the ongoing negotiations about role of journalist and journalism in society and the requirements that these roles set for the whole profession. The three different public journalism initiatives make it possible to approach journalistic professionalism in a concrete manner and see beyond abstract value statements often prominent in journalist surveys. The context of three different public spheres also prepares the way for understanding the diversified nature of journalistic professionalism (Glasser 1992).

Towards a Diversified Understanding of Professionalism

Journalistic professionalism and professional knowledge is a much debated issue among scholars. The concept of professional journalism has been defined in various ways. Zelizer notes that the traits by which sociologists usually identify professions – such as certain level of skill, autonomy, service orientation, licensing, testing of competence and codes of conduct – are not displayed by journalism or journalists. Yet professionalism is invoked for aims other than merely listing external traits. For journalists, in the USA in particular, the idea of professionalism has provided an ideological orientation that facilitates the maintenance of journalism's collective boundaries. In its most demanding sense professionalism thus provides *a body of knowledge* that instructs individuals what to do and what to avoid in any given circumstance (Zelizer 2004, 33).

Soloski (1997, 139) also argues that it is not important to argue about which occupations qualify as professions, but to ask what it means for an occupation to claim that it is a profession. However, Soloski points out that professionalism is also a means of control in the news organisations. Together with news policies, professionalism acts as a method of control for the managers wishing to make a profit. Professionalism is thus also a way to minimise conflict in the newsroom (p. 146-147).

The discussion about journalistic professionalism is often blurred by a simplification or homogenisation of the view on professional journalism. Glasser evinces

a view that professionalism and professional education particularly carry with them a trend towards unifying knowledge through bypassing differences in experience. Thus professionalisation implies standardisation and homogeneity. Glasser criticises the idea that professional techniques of journalists are transnational in nature (Glasser 1992, 134-135).

Early cross-national surveys supported the view that, despite different national cultures and patterns of professional education and organisational forms of the trade, the stated professional values of the journalists did not differ greatly from nation to nation (Schudson 1991, 150). The more recent surveys point out, however, that even if some general patterns and trends among the journalists around the globe can be found there are still many differences. In fact, in a survey of 21 countries, there was more disagreement than agreement over the relative importance of journalistic roles – such as quick and accurate reporting, providing access for the public to express views and acting as a watchdog of the government – and hardly any evidence to support the idea of universal occupational standards (Weaver 1998, 468, 480).

It is important to see professionalism as a diversified construct. Hallin and Mancini take into account the national differences and the distinctions between different media systems in relation to professionalism. In their comparative study professionalism is introduced as one of the key variables in media systems. Hallin and Mancini have developed a way of interpreting professionalism in the frame of a political system of a given country. They single out three main dimensions in professional journalism: autonomy, distinct professional norms and public service orientation of the profession (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 34-37). These dimensions are apparent in various ways in different media systems. Finland is part of the North and Central European media model or in other words, the *democratic corporatist model*, located in Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The democratic corporatist countries are characterised by early and strong development of journalistic professionalism (p. 143).

In Finland the professional foundation of journalists is therefore embedded in the democratic corporatist media model. However during the last 20 years or so in the democratic corporatist countries there has been a shift from politically coloured reporting and advocacy towards "critical professionalism," which has traditionally been stronger among the journalists working in the sphere of the North Atlantic, liberal media system (p. 170-178).

Despite the useful framework by Hallin and Mancini, more interpretation of journalism as a profession within the limits of a distinct media system is clearly needed. Journalistic professionalism is also diversified within the national frame. Interpretations of the civic turn and public journalism can shed light on journalistic professionalism, especially concerning the dimensions of *autonomy*, *professional norms* and *public service orientation*. Following these lines, this paper presents a setting in which the journalists in the three newspapers have differing relations to the *market*, *administration* and *the public* due to the nature of their immediate public sphere. Or rather, professionalism – understood as differentiation from other public actors – offers a way to articulate these relations differently in distinct public spheres. It is fruitful to contrast these different public spheres and professional journalism, because there is a tendency to see the national level having the highest status and "big-city journalism" as the standard of all journalism (Glasser 1992, 136).

Public journalism initiatives presented here also create a particularly interesting ground for research because as Peters (1999, 103) states, most public journalism initiatives have emphasised the local as the chief site of political engagement, even if the most acute problems are rather mixtures of the local, national and global elements. Gans (2003, 37, 98) also pays attention to the fact that American public journalism has mainly been attempted in small and middle-sized towns. However, here we have the opportunity to compare three initiatives, including the national context.

The Civic Turn in Journalism

The "civic turn" in journalism is connected with the wider issues of civil society and civic participation that have been dominant themes of discussion before and after the turn of the new millennium (cf. Dahlgren 2006). Public/civic journalism is a movement originating from the United States and it is a normative yet experimental set of journalistic ideas and practices, which emphasise the importance of citizen[1] involvement in journalism.

The initial take off for public journalism was the critique of the election coverage in the 1988 presidential election in the USA. At that time reporting concentrated on competition and poll results rather than on actual issues. This "horse race" style left issues relevant to the majority of the electorate uncovered. Journalists started to ask if they had remembered the public often enough, and concluding that the answer was "no," they set out to find the public again by changing journalism (Rosen 2000, 680).

Public journalism coverage was more concretely "invented" through a series of practical experiments in the early 1990s. It was extended through attempts to develop daily and weekly routines from the mid-90s on, and with the advent of the Internet, new interactive approaches to civic coverage have emerged. While the earliest initiatives were aimed at expanding the scope of election coverage, the later projects have been designed to cover the problems and to address specific community issues. To date at least 600 public journalism experiments and projects in 320 newspapers have taken place in the USA (Friedland 2003, 119; Friedland and Nichols 2002).

Public journalism has also faced a lot of criticism. Firstly, most of the criticism is targeted at the role of the journalist. Many critics resent the idea of the reporter becoming too much involved in community life, thus not being able to retain her independency and objectivity. The critics take the view that public journalism merely originates in an attempt to gain a profit by pandering to audiences, and therefore the role of the journalist as the advocate of the public good is questionable (Buckner and Gartner 1998; Hardt 2000; Haas and Steiner 2003).

Another area of criticism is the idea of deliberative democracy and the scale on which it is possible. The critics, for instance, think that the idea of public journalism is too centred on discussion and thus the benefits of the experiments are left on the level of face-to-face communication and local matters (Peters 1999; Pauly 1999).

A third set of critical points focuses on the content of the stories produced according to public journalism ideals. The critics claim that the stories cannot offer anything new to the readers, that they are homogenous and too rational or conventional for the taste of readers (Davis 2000; Gans 2003).

The fourth critical theme deals with the incoherency of public journalism theory and its heavy dependence on experiments and projects (Meyer 1995; Glasser 2000). The critics claim that public journalism scholars never tried to build a real theory for the movement, and therefore without a guiding philosophy, public journalism advocates cannot criticise the existing practices or develop new ones (Haas and Steiner 2003, 34; Haas and Steiner 2006, 239-240).

It is worth noting that the critical voices seem to centre around the basic dimensions of professionalism and public sphere: autonomy of journalism from the *market* and *administration* and the position of *the public*. Vigorous debate indicates that public journalism initiatives provide fruitful empirical material for studying professional values in journalism, even if the peak of the movement seems to have been passed in the USA. Some writers estimate that the "old public journalism" has now morphed into web-based "public's journalism" – such as blogging – due to the rapid technological development and to the fact that the original public journalism enthusiasts, such as Jay Rosen, have "gone electronic" (Witt 2004). This paper, however, concentrates on the "old" public journalism style, in which the media professionals' actions and interpretations are considered central. Technological development has of course influenced and will continue to influence the ways in which "old" public journalism is understood conceptually.

In Finland the active participation of the researcher community and the general reader-oriented trend (Hujanen 2006), as well as the trend of developing municipal administration more participatory (Harju 2006) have kept the term "public journalism" in the vocabulary of most practising journalists. It was mostly the journalism researchers who introduced public journalism to the Finnish newsrooms in the 1990s. The idea of public journalism arrived in Finland during the economic depression. Hence there were serious concerns about the erosion of the traditionally strong reader and subscriber base. So, in Finland, as well as in the USA in fact, public journalism has always had a connection with the struggle for economic survival, even if the movement has been seen as an opposite development to audience strategies based on merely appealing to wealthy readership segments. The first Finnish public journalism initiatives were practical experimentation, in which the whole process itself was seen as a research result. Thereafter some methods of public journalism gained ground and some news organisations started to develop their own citizen-oriented approaches (Kunelius and Heikkilä 2003). The experiments outlined below are examples of such independently developed methods.

Public Journalism in Local, Regional and National Newspapers

In this paper I will analyse three citizen-oriented projects in the Finnish newspapers from 2003 to 2006. The cases come from a local newspaper, *Itä-Häme*, a regional newspaper, *Aamulehti,* and the leading quality daily in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*.[2]

Table 1: Local, Regional and National Newspapers

	Local newspaper	Regional newspaper	National newspaper
Name	*Itä-Häme* (*IH*)	*Aamulehti* (*AL*)	*Helsingin Sanomat* (*HS*)
Location and circulation area	Small town of Heinola (population 21,000) and the four neighbouring towns	City of Tampere (pop. 200,000) and the surrounding province	City of Helsinki (pop. 560,000) and the metropolitan area;
Circulation (2005)	12,000	137,000 (third largest daily in Finland)	431,000 (largest daily in Finland)
Publication pace	6 days a week	7 days a week	7 days a week
Form of public journalism	Permanent and specialized civic reporter	Wide citizen-oriented trend, e.g. election series, discussion events	Election coverage project based on citizens' agenda

The local newspaper *Itä-Häme* (*IH*) is the first Finnish news organisation to establish a permanent post for a so-called civic reporter. The task of the civic reporter is always summarised and published along with the "civic articles."

> *The topic of this article came from the readers. Would you have in mind a theme which would concern the readers of* Itä-Häme*? The theme can be critical or positive, as long as it is somehow connected to your everyday life. We can for instance go and meet the decision-maker or a politician who is in charge of the issues of concern. Ideas and tips can also be delivered anonymously* (Description of the civic reporter's article*, IH*).

The public journalism approach of the local paper sprang from the newspaper's own desire to change its working routines. The need to change was initiated by a study, which indicated, for example, that most of the news stories were presenting only a single voice, usually that of the authorities.

One of the reactions to this result was the idea of creating a post for a civic reporter, who would act as the bridge between the citizens and the paper. The civic articles produced by the reporter can be categorised into four main groups: (1) citizen–decision-maker encounters, (2) everyday life stories, (3) activation/motivation stories and (4) columns for questions and answers from the public. None of the earlier Finnish public journalism projects have resulted in creating permanent posts. In this sense the approach of *IH* is quite significant.

Besides creating the civic reporter's post, the whole organisation at *IH* has undergone restructuring. The format of the paper was also changed from broadsheet to tabloid in 2005. These developments have all been part of a strategy to build up a newspaper that would be truly local and close to its readers. Underlying this reform have been concerns about circulation figures, media competition and loss of young readers. Therefore a decidedly market-influenced viewpoint has framed the whole process, and the top management is strongly advocating public journalism.

Regional or provincial newspapers have a historically strong role in the Finnish media field. The end of the political party press system has led to a structure in which a dominant newspaper usually practises "neutral" journalism and presents itself as the voice of the province. There has been a fairly lasting bond between the readers and the newspaper, often decided for them by the area in which they live

(Kunelius 1999; Hallin and Mancini 2004). At present this structure is changing due to concentration of media ownership.

In *Aamulehti* (*AL*) the first steps towards public journalism were initiated and led by researchers. These experiments in the 1990s centred on reader–newspaper relationship, for instance specialised suburb reporting and panel discussions including members of the public (Heikkilä and Kunelius 1999; Kunelius 1999). Nowadays the approach has merged with the broad idea of reader orientation, which can be interpreted as a more market-driven version of public journalism. *AL* has also developed the use of audience segment monitoring methods (RISC analysis) in its journalistic work (Hujanen 2005). The way in which market monitoring has been incorporated into public journalism is quite interesting, since these methods can originally be seen as being opposed to each other.

In any case, during the past ten years *AL* has developed a series of citizen-based reporting methods. It continuously (1) organises public discussion sessions which gather together decision makers and the general public. The paper has also published (2) stories where members of the public were taken to interview the ministers of the government and to discuss with them. The purpose was to bring together the ideas and viewpoints of citizens and the top-level decision-makers. Third distinctly citizen-based method is the so-called (3) news van, which tours the province in order to elicit the views and opinions of the public.

Helsingin Sanomat (*HS*) is a nation-wide newspaper, with regional emphasis on the metropolitan area. The paper has an overwhelming position in the Finnish media field. It is estimated that every fifth Finn reads the newspaper. The structure of the national press market is quite unique, since there is no competition among the subscription-based national dailies. The electronic media and the tabloids are seen as the closest competitors for *HS*.

During the Finnish parliamentary elections of 2003 *HS* wanted to base its pre-election reporting on a "citizens' agenda" rather than on the agenda of the political elite. Through the project the newspaper wanted to come closer to the "regular people." The relatively vague idea of "doing something different" was developed further by the chief of the politics department. He had been inspired by public journalism and sought examples of election coverage from the American and Nordic experiments.

The paper organised a survey of the public at large, in which voters were asked about the most important questions they would like to have an impact in the election. The themes turned out to include health care, care of the elderly and unemployment. Ten themes were then covered in a series of articles written as team work. The approach followed the American election projects based on the "voters' agenda" (Potter n.d.) fairly systematically, but on the other hand, nothing as thorough as this had not been done before in the Finnish press, and in that sense the approach was a sign of the civic turn of journalism in the context of the national public sphere.

In the following sections I will interpret the discourses of Finnish public journalism in more detail. The data in this article consists of interviews with journalists conducted 2004–2005.[3] I will first describe how the journalists themselves interpret and frame the arrival of public journalism in their newsrooms. Secondly, I will compare the ways in which the national, regional and local contexts appear in the interpretations about the role of the public or citizens. By analysing these discourses

I will finally be able to identify the prevailing conditions of the professional culture against which the whole civic turn is being mirrored.

Interpreting the Civic Turn

As outlined above, public journalism ideas have reached the three newspapers in slightly different forms. The civic turn can also be understood as a process, in which all of the newspapers studied are at different stages. The civic turn is thus also placed in varying frames in each of the papers.

At the local level the reporters see public journalism in two ways. On the one hand, it is seen as an idea initiated by management: the editor-in-chief and the local area manager. The civic turn is thus interpreted to be a part of the series of organisational reform projects that have taken place in the newsrooms, and in that sense it is seen as an approach or a strategic choice that touches everyone on the staff. On the other hand, public journalism is mostly seen as work that first and foremost belongs to the paper's civic reporter. Even so, the journalists interviewed have a positive attitude towards public journalism, but their willingness to apply the ideas and the adopted practices varies: "There are some conventions about the division of labour, but applying public journalism is by no means restricted. But in practice only few have time to do civic stories, because the working pace is so fast" (Journalist, *IH*).

The permanent position of the civic reporter and the reform projects in *IH* have prepared the ground to facilitate discussion about the ideas of public journalism. Yet the civic turn in the local newspaper is by no means total, even if the newsroom is quite small and the whole approach more coherently defined by the staff than, for instance, in the national newspaper.

Another clearly articulated frame in the civic turn of *IH* is economic pressure; the need to make a profit. The interviewees, especially the civic reporter herself, state that economic requirements affect their work and the whole newsroom culture. In a small newspaper with a small staff, the economic realities are manifested quite concretely: for every reporter there is a pressure to produce at least a story per day and the routines, such as lay-out shifts, rotate. The market logic has been clear from the start and the economic discourse has spread throughout the staff. It is clear that the civic reporter and the whole newsroom are struggling between the two logics behind (public) journalism: on the one hand, the approach is justified by the logic of the market economy, and on the other hand by the logic of the democratic role of journalism (Hujanen 2006).

It is worth noting that Wahl-Jorgensen found similar patterns in the ways U.S. editors in local newspapers view readers' letters. On a normative side, the letters to the editor are seen as part of deliberative democracy and the letters section as a public forum. But on the financial side, the letters function as a customer service, and as a local material they can boost the economic success of the paper. The editors consider that it is possible and desirable to combine the democratic interests of the community with the financial interests of the newspapers (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002, 130). This kind of normative-economic combination is also explicit in the Finnish local newspaper, and it is obvious that the journalists are aware of it and accept it without too many questions. It might very well be that economic and professional fields have always been less differentiated in the local context. This – perhaps

somewhat paradoxically – offers fertile soil for developing the methods of public journalism and other professionally demanding approaches.

The general view among journalists in the regional paper seems to be that the staff has quite widely accepted the citizen-oriented approach as the way of doing journalism. Since AL, in contrast to the two other newspapers in this study, has the longest history of a public journalism approach, there has been more time to socialise the journalists to the particular newsroom culture and its values, routines and rituals (Schudson 1991). The approach has become such an integral part of news work that the journalists have difficulties in identifying the early stages of public journalism in their paper.

Nonetheless, the journalists in *AL* point out that the roots of public journalism are connected to historical developments in journalism and journalistic norms in general. Many journalists report that it is important to remember the idea of the newspaper as a public forum and a provider of useful information. Citizen-based journalism is seen as a part of this continuum. These notions can be better understood in the light of the Finnish regional papers' history. The regional press has a strong tradition of carrying forward the "voice of the province" into the national public sphere. This traditional task has presumably made it easier for journalists in the regional paper to frame public journalism as a suitable effort.

There is, however, another, more market-oriented frame for the civic turn in AL. The use of many differing terms to interpret the civic turn is somewhat problematic. The term "reader orientation" is sometimes used as a synonym for "public journalism," even though the meaning is slightly different. The connotation of "reader" in this context is closer to "consumer" than to "citizen." I am therefore inclined to say that "reader orientation" is used in the regional paper to refer to reader satisfaction. "Public journalism" and "citizen orientation," in contrast, refer to situations where the importance of civic participation in the news-making process is underlined. Thus, there is a clear discourse about "getting close to the reader" in all the reporters' answers, but a precise definition of public journalism is not so obvious.

Journalists in the regional – as well as in the local – paper clearly identify the central role of journalism in civic life but they also identify the existence of the market logic. Particularly among the journalists in *AL* the idea of "branding" becomes central. The interpretations of the civic turn therefore evoke also a critical discourse about the justification of the approach. As suggested by an *AL* journalist, "the main idea of the news van tours is to bring visibility for *Aamulehti*, it is very simply and clearly the point. The story is only a secondary purpose."

The combination of normative-economic justification that is seen as fairly acceptable by the local journalists is not so easily swallowed by the reporters acting in the framework of the regional public sphere. The critical ethos may rise from the tradition of the democratic corporatist system: business should be the work for distinct professionals. In societies where the idea of professional communities with special qualifications, rules and practices is widely diffused, it is more likely that journalists, too, will adapt to professional ideals such as autonomy (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 196). The profession here is clearly more differentiated from the market than on the local level.

Most of the journalists in the national daily are familiar with the term "public journalism," but a clear label of public journalism was never given to the election

project. The phrases used by the journalists in *HS* are "the view of the readers" and "activating the citizens." The citizen-based election coverage is seen as a separate project, thus in a way as a deviation from the normal political reporting. The project frame becomes clear when the interviewees report that journalists are usually willing to take part in clearly defined projects, especially if they are connected to the core tasks of journalism such as parliamentary election coverage.

Journalists underline that the citizen-oriented election coverage was a planned intent with a beginning and an end. However, some suggestions about a wider shift – the broader civic turn – in the professional values are indicated by few journalists. A *HS* journalist believes that "in general journalists as professionals have started to think more about the process of doing a story. For instance the questions about public: Who are you writing for? This discussion is nowadays more active."

Inside the large media house this shift is being exemplified by increased co-operation between different departments and by the removal of the old division between politics and domestic affairs sections in the paper. The journalists interpret such a division as old fashioned and consider that it used to prevent ways of reporting the political decisions and the effects of those decisions in the same story. There seems to be criticism towards internal differentiation of the newspaper's content and organisation.

According to the interviews in *HS*, there has been more talk about the "ordinary people" after the turn of the millennium, but the discussion has been mostly on the level of "serving the readers." A group of *HS* journalists interviewed in the study summarise the shift in this way:

– We have got closer to people during the past years for many reasons; people have become more enlightened, they contact us more vigorously with e-mail…
– The circulation figures have gone down.
– Yes they have gone down, and they have made us think how we could, so to speak, serve the readers better.

The circulation pressures are apparent in this quotation, but as mentioned, that is not a substantial dimension in the general interpretation of the civic turn in *HS*. However, it is interesting to see how the journalists believe that the readers have become more "enlightened" and demanding, which also poses challenges for public service orientation. The journalists in *HS* seem to foster the idea of elite readership.

Citizens' Role in Public Journalism

The interpretations of the civic turn in each of the newspapers also bring forth notions about the role of the citizens in journalism. In the Finnish context, the journalists interpret citizen–journalist relations much within the framework of the public service ideal of journalistic professionalism. But again, the role of the citizens in the different public spheres is also slightly differing.

Journalists in the local paper regard citizens as actors, who can and should have a role also in the news and not just in the lifestyle pages. The journalists seem puzzled by the fact that the public considers them so distant. One of the journalists in *IH* raised a simple question: "I don't know why we are so hard to approach?" In fact, approachability was an important motivation behind the civic reporter concept.

The paper wanted to have a reporter who would become a familiar face among the public and would also create more natural interaction between the newsroom and the readers. In all, the idea of public journalism is based on the notion that social, moral and ideological barriers that journalists have created to protect their independence should be countered in order to break up the detached reputation that journalists have (Meyer 1995).

The smaller the paper, the closer the public – this is one of the myths of local journalism. Yet the local journalists' everyday experience and interpretations in *IH* point in another direction than the myth. The citizen–journalist relationship is not in any sense more "natural" in the local setting than in the national or regional settings.

> *There was a lot of discussion that we are writing about the wrong issues if they don't cause any reactions among the readers. And that is why we now have to go where the people are and get the issues from there, because before we had the problem that our contacts with the local people were so poor* (Journalist, *IH*).

The role of the citizen in the local context is also connected to a symbiotic relationship between the paper and local officials. Journalists wish to have the public as backup when they choose topics or angles for their stories, so that the paper could try to loosen the traditionally strong ties with the local authorities. After the civic turn in *IH*, the journalists have become aware of the fact that it is not necessarily natural for journalism to use the existing power structures as the primary news sources. That practice has rather been a result of professional norms such as objectivity (Soloski 1997, 144).

The shift from existing power structures to civic sources is highlighted by the civic reporter's work and her networks. In addition text-messages, letters-to-the-editors and Internet questionnaires are used as methods for learning about the citizens' agenda.

In contrast to the local setting, the position of citizen in the regional newspaper is not to act as a partner to the journalists in their search for autonomy from the officials. Journalists in *AL* seem quite sure of their role as critics and watchdogs, so that the citizens are not harnessed for that purpose. However, in the so-called encounter stories, in which citizens are taken to discuss with the ministers in the capital city, the people are seen as representatives of the province and the grass root level. In this sense the "regular people" are positioned as a counterforce to the governmental politics orchestrated from the capital, but the paper does not need the public to boost its own position as a watchdog; rather as a common voice of the province.

> *A goal is to increase reader-activism; it means that the reader cannot only be the object, but that he needs to act as well. He needs to be the voice of the ordinary inhabitant of this province, too* (Journalist, *AL*).

The paper clearly positions itself as the main actor in the regional public sphere. The public sphere needs to be revitalised and the citizens need to be activated to take part in public life. In fact, in that sense the citizens are actually positioned as objects that need to be helped. The idea becomes obvious when the journalists talk about the discussion events that are organised around the region of Tampere. They

consider that if it was not for the paper's own initiative, no one in the region would be willing to organise public debates in some of the smallest towns.

In contrast to these notions, it is interesting that the position of the citizens in the public journalism approach of the regional paper is quite demanding: citizens are wished to be active and well prepared. Without them there would be nothing to write about after the discussions and thus the relationship between the public and the media works in two ways. Ideally both parties would gain something from the situation: the public gets the chance to deliberate and the newspaper gets material for stories.

In the context of the national daily, the position of the citizen is less concrete. Ideally citizens would act as experts on their own lives, but in practice they are often a device needed for writing a story.

> *Sometimes ordinary people are just like elements that we use in a dramaturgical way. But people can also have very good knowledge about their own field, and in that sense they are also experts* (Journalist, *HS*).

Thus compared with the situation in the smaller papers, the journalists in *HS* seem to view the public more symbolically. The main role for the citizens in *HS* is to provide the stories with "the citizen angle" that has been neglected earlier in political reporting. This might result in the situation where civic action is lifted out of its larger context rather being integrated into the journalistic practices. People may be asked to prepare (anonymous) questions for the politicians or act as informants in a survey, but the relationship between the journalists and the citizens is not very operational or active.

Is it simply due to the very nature of the national public sphere that the citizens are positioned in a symbolic way? I am hesitant to draw such direct conclusions, but it is possible that the rather autocratic role of *HS* as *the* forum of national public discussion makes more demands of journalists to justify why certain citizens are given access to the public sphere and others are not. In other words, in the national public sphere there are more pressures for the citizens to represent a larger group than in the local context. Therefore it might be less controversial for journalists in the national paper to "use" citizens as anonymous voices or examples of something rather than to adopt truly participatory methods.

Professional Culture and Public Spheres

In this article I have considered the role of local, regional and national contexts and the interpretation of public journalism in three different newspapers. In this concluding section I will summarise the interpretations that the civic turn evokes in each of the cases about the relationship between professional journalists and the *market*, *administration* and *the public*. This summary, then, will draw an outline of the prevailing professional culture of each of the newsrooms.

The local newspaper *IH* wishes to move away from the cautious and uncritical newsroom culture. Public journalism initiative and the work of the civic reporter are seen as integral parts of this shift. There is, however, a clear market-influenced strategy combined with the public journalism initiative of the local paper. The management of *IH*, especially, underlines the important function of the civic reporter's articles as method for achieving reader satisfaction. Nevertheless, the interviewees in the local paper stress that the civic articles are at their best when they lead to

concrete changes or have an impact on the local community. Hence the journalists do not interpret the civic turn solely as a marketing manoeuvre.

A strong prevailing condition in the local newspaper is its closeness to the administration. Schudson points out that one study after another comes up with essentially the same observation that the story of journalism is the story of the interaction of reporters and officials (Schudson 1991, 148). In fact, one of the clearest discourses in *IH* is about the need to turn away from dependence on local officials, agenda-driven journalism and elitism.

The citizens, therefore, are seen in *IH* as partners for local journalists in their attempts to reduce their dependence on the municipal officials and other authorities. Interpretations of the civic turn at the local level indicate that the prevailing journalistic culture is viewed as rather conservative by the staff itself. The journalists and editors wish to develop the paper towards sharper criticism, more intensive style and participatory reporting (Gans 2003, 95), which would enable the public to participate in politics and have an impact on the local affairs.

The regional paper *AL* has been deliberately developed towards reader-orientation in past years. This orientation is the clearest element of the professional culture and widely accepted in AL, but not totally without criticism. Some journalists criticise the notion that reader/citizen orientation has become too much a certainty in the paper, a shallow phrase or a marketing trick. Journalists seem to recognise and challenge the market logic more actively in *AL* than in the local context of IH.

In contrast to the concerns about business influence, the journalists acting in the regional public sphere do not seem to be alarmed about dependence on the authorities. *AL* is the most important newspaper in the region and it has achieved a position as a dominant public actor and a critic. This position might result from the fact that the regional public sphere lacks the kinds of institutional and representative power structures that are to be dealt with in the local and national contexts.

Concerning the role of the public, a prevailing element in the journalistic culture of the regional paper is clear: activation of civic life. The ideas of activating people, encouraging them and helping the citizens to create their own agenda are repeated in the answers of the journalists in *AL*.

In the context of the national public sphere in *HS*, civic turn is seen as an idea that is percolating down among the journalistic field in general. Within *HS*, however, public journalism is viewed as a separate project. This interpretation indicates that the professional culture of the national newspaper is rather solid and not easily shaken by new approaches. The journalists feel secure in their own position within the organisation and they are also well aware of the leading role of *HS* as the forum for national public debate. Questions about market-driven journalism are quite scarce in the national context. The professional culture of the national newspaper is thus most clearly differentiated from the business culture.

However, journalists' interpretations of the civic turn shed light on the fact that the journalistic culture in its relation to administration is at a crossroads in *HS*. The journalists are pondering whether the paper should continue to follow the agenda set by the national political and administrative apparatus and keep itself in the role of a transmitter, or whether it should identify itself in a more proactive way. In the context of the civic turn a slight shift in the firm status of the administration as the primary source of news is apparent.

The relationship between *HS* and the public is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand citizens are seen as movable particles in the news stories, but on the other hand as real actors or experts, who should be taken seriously in the news making process. The interactive culture between readers and journalists is still in its developing stage even though Internet has made reader feedback easier and the comments from the online discussions are now considered more methodically than before.

Table 2 summarises the findings of this paper: the frames that are given to the civic turn, the role of the citizen in journalism and the prevailing conditions of the professional culture against which public journalism is being interpreted in different newspapers.

Table 2: Summary of Interpretations of the Civic Turn in Three Finnish Newspapers

	Frames of the civic turn	Role of citizens	Professional culture
IH in the local public sphere	Civic turn as part of organisational development, matter of recruitment. Idea connected with circulation pressures.	Citizens help the paper to maintain distance from the local authorities.	Professional culture and reporting is cautious. Paper has close relations with local authorities, but is distant from the regular readers.
AL in the regional public sphere	Civic turn part of longer development of reader-oriented methods in the paper; connected to economic pressures and sense of media competition.	Two-way relationship: paper helps to activate civic life, and citizens are required activeness in return. Citizen activity is needed for writing stories.	Professional culture actively built around "reader orientation," but not without criticism.
HS in the national public sphere	Larger civic turn in journalism is sensed, but not clearly articulated in own paper. Own approach seen as distinct project.	Citizens more in a symbolic role. Still a clear wish to get ordinary citizens interested and represented in journalism.	Solid professional culture: paper is seen as a centre of national public discussion, which normally stems from flow of materials provided by authorities.

To revert to Hallin and Mancini's three main dimensions of professionalism: firstly, journalistic autonomy is continuously been contested by financial logic, which crosses the borders between marketing departments and editorial offices. Public journalism is by no means free of this market logic, and some believe that public journalism is actually in the centre of this transformation. According to observations in this paper it can be claimed that market interests and democratic concerns coexist (Haas and Steiner 2006, 243; Hujanen 2006). The nature and size of the public sphere together with the economic situation of the paper seem to affect the intensity in which either of the logics is articulated. All in all, the journalists in the three newspapers see their own newspapers as fairly autonomous, central and influential actors in their immediate public sphere, based on the strategic position they have in the flow of information (cf. Hallin and Mancini 2004, 34).

Secondly, public journalism and its relationship to *professional norms* vary slightly in the various public spheres. In the local context especially, public journalism is

not seen as a threat to existing professional norms, but as a way to improve the journalistic performance. In the regional context, however, public journalism and its promotional side are partly seen as contradictory to existing professional norms. It is interesting that in the regional paper, where public journalism has been integrated into the newsroom culture most extensively, the journalists also seem to recognise most clearly the controlling nature of professionalism (cf. Solsoki 1997). In the context of the national public sphere the current professional culture and its norms are strong. However, in all of the newspapers the journalists report that public journalism could start to threat current professional norms if the journalists practising it were to forget source criticism, objectivity and newsworthiness. Thus public journalism is merged with the existing professional norms.

Lastly, *public service* orientation has clearly been enhanced by the civic turn in each of the newspapers. However, there is a slight shift away from the more traditional understanding of public service as merely disseminating information or education. Public service in the context of public journalism is seen more as an interactive task. In all of the three public journalism initiatives the public and its needs have been placed in the focus. The public is thus best served by including them more actively in the discussions going on in the public sphere. It is possible though that the strong legacy of democratic-corporatism evokes journalists to interpret the civic turn as citizen orientation rather than mere business tactics or reader orientation.

In the light of this analysis, the tools that public journalism provides for development of journalism seem more appropriate for local and regional settings. Or rather, the public journalism approach of the national newspaper in this case appears to be less connected with its public than the approaches of the other papers. The potential of public journalism is better realised in the more extensive and permanent approaches, which call for more serious professional self-reflection. It is obvious, however, that there has been a transformation in the understanding of public journalism in Finland. There has occurred a shift from the early approaches of learning by doing towards a more clearly articulated and business-oriented "format development."

The closest point of reference to the newspapers and their staff is their immediate circulation area – whether it is local, regional or national. That area is most often used as point of departure in the journalists' interpretations. But is the circulation area the same as the public sphere in which the newspaper acts? The simple answer to that is: the journalists seem to think so. Or to put it more mildly: it is not natural for the journalists to explicate that other kinds of public spheres also exist, since the role of the newspaper is seen to be so central. In these Finnish cases and in the public journalism frame, the public sphere seems to be by definition a journalistic public sphere. The public spheres in which the newspapers act have the press in the centre, public discussion is led by the newspaper and the public agenda is set in the newspaper. The journalists' perceptions of the public sphere seem to be culturally and regionally bound.

Acknowledgements:

The author wishes to thank Risto Kunelius and Heikki Heikkilä for assistance in preparing the manuscript.

Notes:

1. Citizenship is a notion built on interlocking rights and responsibilities of individuals as members of social entities. The term "citizenship" has at least legal, political, social and cultural layers (Calabrese 1999; Couldry 2006). In this article I am not referring to citizenship as legal status, but as a form of social agency that is connected to distinct practices of politics and communication. Citizens are considered members of the public; participating actors in the public sphere (Dahlgren 2006).

2. The newspapers were chosen for this study to exemplify some of the more systematic experiments of public journalism in Finland. These papers may not, therefore, represent the most typical types of regional and local papers.

3. I conducted the interviews in groups of two or three in the national newspaper and individually in the other newspapers. Interviews were also transcribed. Number of informants: *Helsingin Sanomat* 11, *Aamulehti* 8, and *Itä-Häme* 5.

References:

Buckner, Jennie and Michael Gartner. 1998. Public Journalism in the 1996 Elections. In E. B. Lambeth, P. Meyer, and E. Thorson (eds.), *Assessing Public Journalism*, 223-231. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Calabrese, Andrew. 1999. The Welfare State, the Information Society, and the Ambivalence of Social Movements. In A. Calabrese and J. C. Burgelman (eds.), *Communication, Citizenship and Social Policy: Rethinking the Limits of the Welfare State*, 259-278 Lanham (MD.): Rowman & Littlefield.

Couldry, Nick. 2006. Culture and Citizenship. The Missing Link? *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3, 321-339.

Dahlgren, Peter. 2006. Doing Citizenship. The Cultural Origins of Civic Agency in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3, 267-286.

Davis, Steve. 2000. Public Journalism: The Case Against – Debate: Public Journalism. *Journalism Studies 4*, 679-694.

Fraser, Nancy. 1992. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. In C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 109-142. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Friedland, Lewis A. 2003. *Public Journalism. Past and Future.* Dayton: Kettering Foundation Press.

Friedland, Lewis A. and Sandra Nichols. 2002. Measuring Civic Journalism's Progress: A Report Across a Decade of Activity. A Study conducted for The Pew Center for Civic Journalism.

Gans, Herbert J. 2003. *Democracy and the News*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Glasser, Theodor L. and Lee, Francis L.F. 2002. Repositioning the newsroom: the American experience with "public journalism" in R. Kuhn and E. Neveu (eds.), *Political Journalism. New Challenges, New Practices,* 203-224. London: Routledge.

Glasser, Theodor L. 2000. The Politics of Public Journalism – Debate: Public Journalism. *Journalism Studies 4*, 679-694.

Glasser, Theodor L. 1992. Professionalism and the Derision of Diversity. The Case of the Education of Journalists. *Journal of Communication 2*, 131-140.

Harju, Auli. 2006. Citizen participation and local public spheres. An agency and identity focussed approach to the Tampere postal services conflict. In B. Cammaerts and N. Carpentier (eds), *Reclaiming the media. Communication rights and democratic media roles,* 92–106. Bristol: Intellect.

Haas, Tanni and Linda Steiner. 2006. Public Journalism. A Reply to Critics. *Journalism 2*, 238-254.

Haas, Tanni and Linda Steiner. 2003. A Public Philosophy For Public Journalism. In Harper J. and T. Yantek (eds.), *Media, Profit and Politics: Competing Priorities in an Open Society*, 33–52. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.

Hallin, Daniel C and Paolo Mancini. 2004. *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hardt, Hanno. 2000. Conflicts of Interest. Newsworkers, Media and Patronage Journalism. In H. Tumber (ed.), *Media Power, Professionals and Policies*, 209–225. London: Routledge.

Heikkilä, Heikki and Risto Kunelius. 2003. Ajatuksia lainaamassa. Miten kansalaisjournalismin

ajatukset istuivat meille? In N. Malmelin (ed.), *Välittämisen tiede. Viestinnän näkökulmia yhteiskuntaan, kulttuuriin ja kansalaisuuteen. Professori Ulla-Maija Kivikurun juhlakirja*, 179–204. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston viestinnän laitos.

Heikkilä, Heikki and Risto Kunelius. 1999. Pelkkä asenne ei riitä. Kansalaisjournalismi kehityshankkeena suomalaisissa sanomalehdissä. In M. Maasilta (ed.), *Journalismin muutoskaruselli*, 102-123. Tampere : Journalismin tutkimusyksikkö.

Hujanen, Jaana. 2006. Yleisön palvelu markkinaehtoistuvan median journalistien itseymmärryksessä. *Tiedotustutkimus* 2, 30-43.

Hujanen, Jaana. 2005. Murrostuva valtamedia ja yhteiskunnallisen journalismin mieli. *Politiikka 4*, 257-269.

Kunelius, Risto. 1999. Problems, Experiments, Imagination. Research Towards Rethinking Journalism. Paper presented at the Nordic Conference for Mass Communication Research, Kungälv, Gothenburg, August 1999.

Pauly, John J. 1999. Journalism and the Sociology of Public Life. In T. Glasser (ed.), *The Idea of Public Journalism*, 134-151. New York: The Guilford Press.

Peters, John Durham. 1999. Public Journalism and Democratic Theory: Four Challenges. In T. Glasser (ed.), *The Idea of Public Journalism*, 99-117. New York: The Guilford Press.

Potter, Deborah. ND. *Poynter Election Handbook: A Guide to Campaign Coverage*. St. Petersburg, FL: The Poynter Institute.

Meyer, Philip. 1995. *Public Journalism and the Problem of Objectivity.* <http://www.unc.edu/~pmeyer/ire95pj.htm>

Rosen, Jay. 2000. Debate: Public Journalism. Questions and Answers About Public Journalism. *Journalism Studies* 4, 679-694.

Schudson, Michael. 1991. The Sociology of News Production Revisited. In J. Curran and M. Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media and Society*, Chapter 7. London: Arnold.

Soloski, John. 1997. News Reporting and Professionalism: Some Constraints on the Reporting of News. In D. Berkowitz (ed.), *Social Meanings of News. A Text-Reader*, 138-154. Sage Publications.

Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin. 2002. The Normative-Economic Justification for Public Discourse: Letters to the Editor as a "Wide Open" Forum. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly 1,* 121-133.

Weaver, David. 1998. Journalist Around the World: Commonalities and Differences. In D. H. Weaver (ed.), *The Global Journalist*. *News People Around the World*,455-480. Cresskill, NY: Hampton Press.

Witt, Leonard. 2004. Is Public Journalism Morphing into the Public's Journalism? *National Civic Review 3*, 49-57.

Zelizer, Barbie. 2004. *Taking Journalism Seriously. News and the Academy*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Past issues of *Javnost—The Public* include:

1994 - Volume 1:
No.1&2 - Mapping the Field
No.3 - Endangered Languages
No.4 - The Military and the Public

1995 - Volume 2:
No.1 - Separation of Powers and the Media
No.2 - Communication beyond the Nation-State
No.3 - Broadcasting After Communism
No.4 - Access to the Media

1996 - Volume 3:
No.1 - Virtual Democracy
No.2 - Public Service Television
No.3 - Journalism at the Crossroads
No.4 - Corporate Communication

1997 - Volume 4:
No.1 - Communication and Class
No.2 - Public Opinion and Political Representation
No.3 - Media and Politics
No.4 - Communication and Social Policy

1998 - Volume 5:
No.1 - The Media: The Neglected Discourse
No.2 - Community Media: Theory & Practice
No.3 - Tabloidization and the Media
No.4 - Publicity & Technology

1999 - Volume 6:
No.1 - Globalization and Diasporic Communication
No.2 - Media Ownership and Control in East-Central Europe
No.3 - The Economics and Politics of the New Media
No.4 - Computer-Mediated Culture

2000 - Volume 7:
No.1 - Human and Ethnic Rights in Democratic Transition
No.2 - Popular Culture as Political Communication
No.3 - Media (and) War
No.4 - Communication, Freedom, and Change

2001 - Volume 8:
No. 1 - The Need and Possibility of a European Public Sphere
No. 2 - Media and Democracy in Asia
No. 3 - Democratic Rhetoric and Duty of Deliberation
No. 4 - Comparative Perspectives on Democratisation and the Media

2002 - Volume 9:
No.1 - Diasporic Communication
No.2 - E-Networks and Democratic Life
No.3 - Mass Media and Citizenship
No.4 - Digital Television in Europe

2003 - Volume 10:
No.1 - Community Media in Transition
No.2 - Communication in Pre-20th Century Thought
No.3 - Auditing Public Broadcasting
No.4 - Chinese Media after China's Entry into WTO

2004 - Volume 11:
No. 1 - Electronic Networks and Democracy
No. 2 - Censorship and Democracy
No. 3 - New Perspectives on Critical Communication Studies
No. 4 - Book Publishing in Europe

2005 - Volume 12:
No. 1 - Labour and News
No. 2
No. 3 - The MacBride Report – 25 Years Later
No. 4 - The Rhetorical Shape of International Conflicts

Javnost—The Public Subscription

Individuals:	Institutions:
one year €40	one year €80
two years €75	two years €150
three years €105	three years €210

Subscribers will receive a free copy of the December 2003 issue of *Javnost–The Public.*
Checks should be made payable to EURICOM. American Express, MasterCard/Eurocard, Visa, and bank cheques are accepted.

Send subscriptions to: EURICOM, Kardeljeva pl. 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija,
fax: +386 1 5805 106, or use the subscription form at our web site http://www.euricom.si

Javnost—The Public ORDER FORM

Please enter our/my subscription for the following year:
2006 2007 2008

Name/Institution_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

Zip/Postcode _____

Credit Card No. _____

Exp. Date _____

Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ American Express ☐

Signature: _____