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A Small World – Role Models In Scandinavia

A small number of Scandinavian newspapers were the role models for the compact newspaper revolution that has now taken hold of the print media worldwide. Norway and Sweden were at the forefront of developments, while the situation in Denmark, Finland and Iceland was and still is markedly different.

The tabloid format was initially introduced by the more sensationalist evening newspapers. Thereafter the quality papers in the five Scandinavian countries came to accept the format at varying times. In Norway and Sweden the tabloid format was originally taken up by quality newspapers nearly 60

years ago. While in Denmark and Finland the change in format for this type of publication has mainly happened this century. Iceland, like its location, stands somewhat on its own, with a very different format tradition to that of the four other Scandinavian countries.

Three-stage development in Norway and Sweden

The development of compact morning (quality) papers in Norway and Sweden can be categorized in three stages: [1] Non-daily and low circulation newspapers, [2] business press and freebies and [3] major morning daily papers.

Though the stages do not necessarily follow in absolute sequence, the first stage of tabloidization took place mainly in the 1950s and 1960s. The format appeared in the capital cities Oslo and Stockholm at first, subsequently spreading to the regions where there were several competing papers. The format changes were mainly limited to

lesser morning non-daily papers with a low circulation, for example FRIHETEN, FOLKET and UKENS NYTT in Oslo, Norway and LIDINGO TIDNING, LUNDS DAGBLAD, STOCKHOLMS FORSTABLAD and NY DAG in Sweden. Several of the papers that changed format in the early days were also limited in terms of editorial content.

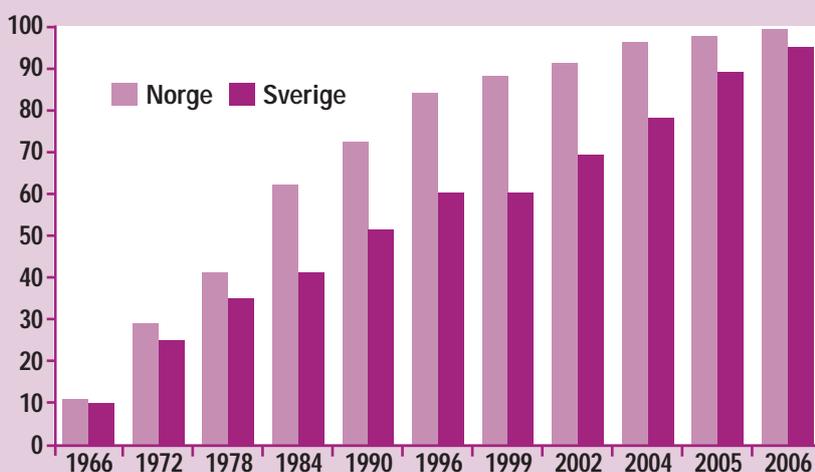
After 1960 the development of the compact format was explosive. In the first half of the decade, the number of tabloid papers doubled in Norway and in Sweden, the proportion increased by around a third. By the beginning of the 1980s in both Norway and Sweden the number of tabloid format newspapers had superseded that of broadsheet papers in the two countries. It is believed that the transition from broadsheet to tabloid was faster in Norway mainly because of its considerably higher proportion of non-daily publications.

At the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s, a number of provincial papers, often the minor ones, took the step to halve their typeset space. The few daily newspapers that did switch to the tabloid format at a relatively early stage in Sweden were often competitive lesser titles. But it was not until the 1980s that newspapers with a circulation over 30,000, like FALU KURIREN and DALA DEMOKRATEN, changed format. That change in format often occurred in conjunction with a change in the press and was frequently supported by the Press Loan Fund, set up in Sweden between 1969 and 1990 to provide subsidized loans. The principal purpose was to reduce the cost to newspaper publishers of credit when they invested in development changes. In Norway however, the link between the competitive situation and time of change in format was not evident.

For many lesser titles the change in format represented a final attempt to save the relevant paper. By standing out from the competition in this way, it was possible to compete on the basis

The tabloid format development in Sweden and Norway 1966-2006

Selection: Quality papers in Sweden and Norway with a publication frequency of at least one day a week.



Source: Formatprojektets tidningsdatabas, Dagspresskollegiet. Høst, Sigurd (2005) Avisåret 2004. Opplagenedgangen fortsetter. Institutt for Journalistikk, Fredrikstad.

of new terms. But not all newspapers managed to buck the downward trend and they were forced to close down some years later, as was the case with NY TID, KURIREN, NORRORT DJURHOLMS TIDNING in Sweden.

The second phase started towards the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s when the 'business tabloids' (DAGENS INDUSTRI in Sweden and NORGES HANDELS- OG SJØFARTSTIDENDE in Norway) were introduced. These newspapers paved the way for a switch in format of the major morning papers by showing advertisers, readers and the industry as a whole that it was perfectly possible to produce a serious paper in tabloid format.

The launch of the free compact newspaper, METRO, into the Swedish market in the 1990s challenged the traditional morning papers. Thereafter new daily papers entering the market were virtually all tabloid or even smaller, such as PUNKTSE, CITY and EXTRA. An ever growing number of larger regional papers began to consider changing, with some switching first from broadsheet to Berliner (which in terms of dimensions

is a format somewhere in between broadsheet and tabloid) and then to tabloid like SMÅLANDS FOLKBLAD and LAHOLMS TIDNING. Others, like DAGENS NYHETER, GÖTEBORGS-POSTEN and NERIKES ALLEHANDA became hybrids, producing part of the paper as a broadsheet with one or two sections in tabloid format. It also became commonplace for the major morning papers to issue supplements, which were generally tabloid size.

In the 1990s the weakening advertising market resulted in the thinning down of newspapers. This manifestation removed another obstacle, which had previously worked against a change in format by the morning papers, that of thickness.

The last phase of the tabloid format development in Norway and Sweden started in 2000, when SVENSKA DAGBLADET, one of Sweden's leading morning papers, changed from broadsheet to tabloid format. Then in 2001, Norway's VARDEN I SKIEN switched to tabloid. The change in format by these newspapers can be described as the starting point for a wave of format changes. These changes gathered

momentum and on 5 October 2004, the three major titles, DAGENS NYHETER, GÖTEBORGS-POSTEN and SYDSVENSKA DAGBLADET switched to tabloid simultaneously. This cooperation was mainly advertising related and marked the final step in the change in format process for the city-based press. Widespread cooperation on advertising between different papers was facilitated by all newspapers being the same size and the transition to tabloid format in Sweden was also helped by the new syndicated advertising system. A system of payment with standardized advertising format modules. This was introduced into Sweden in the mid-1990s, but had already existed in Norway since the 1970s and perhaps explains why tabloidization was always a step ahead there.

Most of the larger regional Swedish newspapers followed in the wake of the city changes: SKÅNSKA DAGBLADET,

ÖSTERSUNDS-POSTEN, BORAS TIDNING, UPPSALA NYA TIDNING, SUNDSVALLS TIDNING, NERIKES ALLEHANDA, NORRKOPINGS TIDNINGAR and HELSINGBORGS DAGBLAD and since 2006 the number of broadsheet papers that remain on the Swedish market can be counted on the fingers of one hand. More than 90% of the daily newspapers in Sweden are now in tabloid format.

Since 2001 both lesser and major newspaper have changed format in Norway, like DRAMMENS TIDENDE, ROMERIKES BLAD, HAUGESUNDS AVIS, TØNSBERGS BLAD, VARDEN, AFTONPOSTEN, BERGENS TIDENDE, SUNNMØRSPOSTEN, AGDER and FÆDRELANDSVENNER. Since both STAVANGER AFTENBLAD and ADRESSAVISEN went tabloid in September 2006, in 2007 all major Norwegian newspapers will be printed in tabloid format, or smaller. The Berliner format has disappeared entirely. Given that 88 percent of Norwegian morning papers

were in tabloid format by the end of the 1990s, the development in Norway this century has not been as dramatic as in Sweden. It should be seen as the final phase of a long process where the most intense period of change came in the 1990s, a decade earlier than in Sweden.

A stop to the tabloidization trend in Finland

Although in Finland the tabloid format was originally introduced as early as the mid 1950s by the sensationalist evening paper ILTA-SANOMAT, it took 30 years for the quality papers to damn the format. As in Norway and Sweden, the format changes were driven by the non-daily and lesser circulation papers, but that is where the similarity ends.

In Finland there are several newspapers published in what is known as the 'euro

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tabloid', a format the same in depth as the accepted tabloid format, but slightly wider at approximately 320 mm. Some 95 percent of non-daily and low circulation newspapers in Finland are published in one or other tabloid format.

In the 1980s, the traditional tabloid format did have an impact on the Finnish daily press, but only to a very limited extent. The principle newspaper that changed format in the 1980s was *Uusi Suomi*, but the trend slowed in the decades that followed with only a few minor papers switching to compact. It was not until 2005 that the Finnish press experienced a resurgence of interest in tabloidization. Both minor and major daily papers, for example *Heinola*, *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Iisalmen Sanomat*, changed their format. Although the process has remained slow, there are several newspapers currently considering a switch of format to tabloid.

At present, 15 percent of newspapers published several times a week in Finland, like *Itä-Savo*, *Lansi-Savo* and *Österbottningen*, are in euro tabloid format and 21 percent of the dailies are printed in the traditional tabloid format, with 64 percent remaining as broadsheets. There is still a strong correlation between low circulation and smaller format and it remains to be seen whether the changes of recent times will spark a new wave of interest in tabloidization in Finland.

Denmark - tabloidization in two stages

In Denmark, although the quality press is accepting the tabloid format in increasing numbers, like Finland development has been very slow.

In comparison with its three Scandinavian neighbors, the Danish newspaper press market is relatively

weak. Denmark lacks local and regional papers that are published every few days such as those found in Sweden, Norway and Finland. But on the side of traditional morning papers, there are district newspapers, which are free local papers. In order to distinguish the district newspapers from the traditional daily papers, most of the district papers were printed in tabloid format from the start. Subscription-based morning papers in Denmark like the *Berlingske Tidende* and *Politiken*, did not wish to be compared with free papers and the evening press, and therefore chose not to switch to the tabloid format for that reason. It was, and to a certain extent still is, the association of tabloidization with, what is known as, tabloid journalism that has kept the broadsheet format alive in Denmark.

As in Norway and Sweden, it was the financial press that first gave some

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credibility to the tabloid format in Denmark. The financial paper, DAGBLADET BØRSEN, changed its format as early as 1970 and has been the role model for the development of the financial press in Norway, Finland, and Sweden and also in Denmark, where a certain limited number of provincial titles joined the tabloid wave in the 1980s and 1990s.

The appearance of free newspapers METRO and EXTRAS in the late 1990s and early 2000 also changed the perception of the tabloid format. In 1997, the first Danish morning paper MORSØ FOLKEBLAD switched to the tabloid format, but it was not until 2000 that Denmark became caught up in the tabloid wave. A handful of newspapers have changed format since, including DAGBLADET INFORMATION, LOLLAND-FALSTERS FOLKETIDENDE JYDSKEVESTKYSTEN and BERLINGSKE TIDENDE and further changes are expected with several Danish papers such as JYLLANDS-POSTEN declaring their intention of switching format in the near future. The question is no longer whether the major Danish morning papers will accept the tabloid format, but rather when. It is highly likely that tabloidization of the Danish daily papers will happen far more rapidly than it did in Norway and Sweden once it really gets underway.

Iceland – a different aspect

Iceland is on its own, not only in geographical terms, but it is also the only Scandinavian country whose newspaper industry is not aiming at conversion to the traditional tabloid format. A few papers in the past were published as broadsheets, the earliest was TIMINN which switched format in 1947. Iceland seems to have settled on its own specific format, which lies somewhere between standard tabloid size and Berliner. Sensationalist journalism has never really entered the Icelandic psyche and consequently there is no association there with the compact format. Only recently did the newspaper, Dagblaðið Visir, commence

publishing a more populace content, but it is still tame compared to other tabloid evening papers worldwide.

Even the major free daily papers FRETTLAÐIÐ and BLAÐIÐ that have become established in Iceland since 2000, have adopted the Icelandic format. It has become standard for the Icelandic press and there is nothing to indicate that this may change in the foreseeable future.

Changing – the present rather than the future

Since 2000, the global trend towards tabloidization has gathered momentum globally. In Scandinavia, however, having started decades earlier, the tabloid format is of the present rather than of the future.

Nevertheless, to arrive at today's situation has been a long and slow process. This is due to various factors. First, the association of the type and style of journalism with the compact format - would it be possible for quality newspapers to undergo the transition without it affecting their lofty standards?

Second, was the fear that the reduction in size of the paper would directly correlate to a reduction in adspend as it was deemed impossible to apply the same charges for less space. There was also the short-term cost of a change in format, such as the modification of existing, or purchase of new technology and the retraining of staff. Additionally, for quite some time it was also impractical for the major papers to change format, because the number of pages was too high to be handled in tabloid format.

The reluctance to change from broadsheet to the smaller tabloid format for newspapers has perhaps principally been the case because the compact size is not editorially the most conducive for a daily paper. The smaller format of newspapers is often attributed to a way of solving the

problem of a decrease in readership, winning advertisers and responding to the fierce competition. However, it remains a fact that we know very little about what a change in format actually means in the long-term.



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