

Labor market policy and media work in Sweden

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this article is to analyze some recent changes in labor market policy and labor law in order to show how changes in this kind of regulation have had consequences for work in the media industries. Even though a considerable amount of research has been performed on media work during the last decade, it is quite uncommon within critical media studies to relate such research to policy and regulation. The point I want to make with this article is that the increasing precariousness and de-professionalization that are occurring within media work, as documented in previous research, must be understood against a background of policy change and political decisions, rather than only being seen as an effect of economic or technological shifts within the media industry. This article hence contributes to the current knowledge of the relationship between labor market policy and the media industry in Sweden; as such, it more generally contributes to the current knowledge of such a relationship in a Nordic welfare state, with all its specificities and differences from other parts of Europe and the world. Nevertheless, the results and discussions in this article are related – and relevant – to more general European tendencies in the area of labor market policy as it relates to the media.

Key words: media work; media production; labor market policy; unpaid labor; free labor; internships

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyze some recent changes in labor market policy and labor law in order to show how changes in this kind of regulation have had

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consequences for work in the media industries. Even though a considerable amount of research has been performed on media work during the last decade (Ashton, 2011; Cohen, 2015a; Deuze, 2007; Fuchs, 2014; Gill, 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2013; Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013; Mosco & McKercher, 2009), it is quite uncommon within critical media studies to relate such research to policy and regulation (cf. Christopherson, 2004). The point I want to make with this article is that the increasing precariousness and de-professionalization that are occurring within media work, as documented in previous research (Cohen, 2015a; De Peuter, 2011; Gill & Pratt, 2008), must be understood against a background of policy change and political decisions, rather than only being seen as an effect of economic or technological shifts within the media industry. In this article, I explore the following questions: How can we understand contemporary labor market policy in relation to media work? What roles do labor market policy and regulation have on contemporary changes in working life within the media industries?

To explore these issues, I delimit myself empirically to one specific national context (Sweden), since policies and regulations around labor market issues are generally a question for the nation-state. Hence, this article contributes to the current knowledge of the relationship between labor market policy and the media industry in Sweden; as such, it more generally contributes to the current knowledge of such a relationship in a Nordic welfare state, with all its specificities and differences from other parts of Europe and the world. Nevertheless, the results and discussion in this article are related – and relevant – to more general European tendencies in the area of labor market policy as it relates to the media. Firstly, the ideological tendency of labor market policies has been similar in most parts of the Western world since the 1990s, with neoliberal doctrines of deregulation dominating the agenda. This ideological tendency has created a “policy paradigm” (Van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003) that is similar in most European countries. Secondly, many of the direct policy shifts and changes in regulation have been orchestrated and coordinated by supra-national bodies, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the European Union (EU), even though the national implementation of shifts in labor market policies has had slightly different characteristics in different countries (Barnard, 2012; Blanpain, 2008; Bruun & Malmberg, 2016).

The article progresses in four steps. First, I discuss media policy research and how labor law can be understood in relation to this research. Second, I discuss labor market policy in general and some specificities of the Swedish case. I then analyze contemporary labor market policy in Sweden. In the fourth and final section, I discuss the consequences of contemporary labor law and labor market policy for media work and, more specifically, for journalism.

Media policy and labor regulation

Although this article mainly concerns labor market policy, my specific interest lies in the implications of labor market policy for work within the media industries. There are well-documented tendencies within media work of a rapid deterioration in working conditions and an increase in precariousness and unpaid labor (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2014; Cohen, 2015a, 2015b; Gill, 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2013; Neff, 2012). These have had marked effects not only for media workers per se, but perhaps also for the media's more general role in society; for example, such tendencies may affect the quality of journalism and public debate.

A clear understanding of contemporary media must include a grasp of the laws and regulations that set the framework for the media, and that create and shape the media system (Humphreys, 1996). Critical analysis of media regulation has usually, and understandably, focused on regulations, policies, political discourse, and the political institutions that are directly related to issues of media and communication, whether on a national or international level (Freedman, 2008; Humphreys, 1996; McQuail & Siune, 1998; Napoli, 2001). This article takes a broader perspective in its discussion of issues of media regulation and policy, since the main object of interest is policy and regulation concerning the labor market (and to some extent higher education) and their effects and consequences on the media industries. Although such research is unusual, there are previous examples of studies engaging with this question. For example, Mark Banks and David Hesmondhalgh (2009) attempted to trace labor market initiatives in relation to so-called cultural or creative labor. They showed that media and cultural policies are often vague or even "silent" on issues of work and labor, resulting in consequences for people working in the sector (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Susan Christopherson (2004) showed that differences in how labor markets are structured and differences in labor market policies between different countries have marked effects on how work within media industries is organized. The boundaries that are set up by overall policies and laws strongly affect the formal contracts that employers and employees agree on within the labor market. Christopherson also points to the importance of grasping the "de-regulation" of the labor markets, which is a global phenomenon, and its impact on the media industry.

This article relates to the central debate within critical analyses of media regulation on how the concept of regulation and policy should be defined and delimited. Concepts such as media regulation, media policy, media management, and media law are present in the debate and are often used in an overlapping fashion. In the English-language debate, it is customary to regard a difference between "policy" and "regulation" (Freedman, 2008). *Policy* includes the more comprehensive ideas,

plans, intentions, and objectives that are defined and debated by political and economic decision-makers in dialogue with citizens, various industry interests and other stakeholder. *Regulation* usually denotes the more specific rules and laws that are expected to lead to the fulfilment of the intended policy objectives. Regulation has traditionally taken place on a national level (Puppis, 2008); however, under the pressure of political, economic, and technological change, media regulation is increasingly settled on an international level, often within and from institutions with limited democratic legitimacy, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the EU (Chakravarty & Sarikakis, 2006; Sarikakis, 2004).

Several researchers have recently come to observe that media regulation and media policy do not only occur in the context of a direct media political discourse. As a result, concepts such as “invisible” (Braman, 2004), “silent” (Moe, 2012), and “latent” (Freedman, 2008) media policy have been introduced in order to draw attention to the fact that issues of media regulation are sometimes determined in political and legal arenas other than those that traditionally handle media policy. For example, Hallvard Moe (2012) showed how important media policy shifts are performed in “silence” as changes are routinely carried out by civil servants and bureaucrats in cooperation with trade and industry. Such changes to the rules can be said to be apolitical or merely pragmatic shifts to meet a changing reality. As Moe points out, however, such “silent” regulatory shifts have major consequences for the overall focus of policy objectives, even though they occur without any public debate or even limited policy discussion. Sandra Braman (2004) and Des Freedman (2008) also point to what they call a “latent media regulation.” By this, they mean the laws, regulations, and frameworks that exist to regulate other domains of society, but which nevertheless can have major (unintended) consequences for the media and for the media system. The concept of media governance has recently gained some popularity. This is a much broader and more inclusive concept that entails all different types of rules and standards – national, international, political, ideological, economic, formal, or informal – that influence and control the media (Puppis, 2010; Terzis, 2008). In this article, I connect to such attempts to widen the scope of media policy analysis through a closer look on labor market policies and their relations to work and labor in the media industries.

Labor market policy in Sweden

Since the 1980s, there has been an ongoing debate about the nature of – and changes within – the labor markets of the Western world. As stated by Wilthagen and Tros (2004), paradigm shifts have taken place in the area of labor market policies as many governments “committed themselves to deregulating labor markets, as law,

regulation and institutions were considered barriers to sound economic development and growth” (p. 172). The juridical boundaries for the employment contract – that is, the work-related specifics that employers and employees are free to negotiate – has thus been loosened.

The overall trend, or the result of these paradigm shifts, is that stability is replaced by flexibility and security is increasingly being replaced by uncertainty and risk for the individual worker. In the past, both in the United States and in Europe, a working life has been marked by long-term employment within the same company, a relative degree of security, and clear and hierarchical career paths. This situation has increasingly been replaced by precarious employment, less clear career paths, the rise of outsourcing and staffing agencies, and weakened unions (Stone, 2013). Even within stable forms of employment and within traditional organizations, so-called flexible working conditions have become increasingly prevalent (Allvin, 2006). Media work has long been more project-based and short-term and less reliant on stable employment relations than other forms of labor (Deuze, 2007). In several ways, the media labor market has thus been a forerunner to developments of a more general character on the labor market as a whole during the last decades. Previous research has shown how networking and the management of contacts and connections have been an integral part of sustaining a career within the media sector (Gill, 2011), and how entrepreneurialism and risk-taking have long been important aspects of working life within the media (Neff, 2012). However, the last decades have seen an increasing commodification of labor within the media sector (Mosco, 2009), accompanied by a de-professionalization of many professions within the media industries (Stiernstedt, 2013; 2015) and correspondingly more short-term employment, unpaid internships, and other forms of “free labor” (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013). To some extent, Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries are different from many other parts of the world when it comes to questions of labor and labor market organization. Most previous research on work and labor in the media industries has been conducted in the context of either Great Britain or the United States, both of which have a specific, liberal, and market-oriented organization of work and labor. Therefore, a case study from a Scandinavian perspective can bring new knowledge to the field of media work. In a study of labor in new media industries, Christopherson (2004) compared the situations in Sweden and Germany with the situation in the United States, and showed that the policy differences between these three countries affect how labor in new media industries is organized.

On a general level, the specificity of the Swedish case can be attributed to the strong influence of social democracy in this part of the world (Esping-Andersen, 2013). The Swedish model for labor market organization is based on self-regulation, negotiations between autonomous parties (unions and employers’ organizations), and

collectivism. The degree of organization, both within trade unions and employers' organizations, has traditionally been very high (about 80–85%). The collective bargaining and the collective agreements reached by the parties have been the main basis for how the Swedish labor market has been organized. There is also extensive labor legislation in Sweden, although this legislation mainly contains those things that are already covered by agreements between the parties on the labor market. Traditionally, during the postwar period in Sweden, the climate between the employers and employees was marked by cooperation, and a series of important agreements were reached (Rönmar, 2007).

Sweden has by no means been unaffected by the neoliberal paradigm shifts described above. However, the image of the Swedish labor market as a special case remains in many respects, especially internationally, even though great shifts have occurred in this model over the last decade. Bengtsson and Berglund (2012) argued that the tendencies that have been observed in other parts of the world also proliferate in the Swedish case, and that it is time to revise the image of the Swedish labor market as a social democratic special case. They even discussed a “paradigm shift” or “great transformation” in which the Swedish labor market has been radically remodeled to be more like the liberal Anglo-American model. The policy changes and pieces of regulation that I discuss in the remainder of this article must be seen against this background.

Some words are needed on the specificity of media work. Traditionally, work in the media industries has been generally understood as “good work,” both in policy debates and in the eye of the public (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009: 417). By “media industries,” I here refer to what David Hesmondhalgh (2013) labeled as the “symbol-creating” sectors in the field of mass communication and media. Hence, I exclude the manufacturing of media technology and the kind of work that is done within media companies that is peripheral to the production of symbolic goods. *Media work* in media industries hence refers to phenomena such as journalism, television production, PR, and the like. Such work has often been understood as intrinsically “cool, creative and egalitarian”, and as allowing for a certain amount of self-realization (Deuze, 2007; Gill, 2002). To some extent, media work does contain – or at least has contained within the mass media and cultural institutions of the 20th century – opportunities for “good work.” These opportunities were ultimately – from a materialist perspective on cultural production – connected to the specific commodity form of media and cultural industries. Bill Ryan (1992) argued that media commodities (symbolic goods) are not as open to standardization and rationalization as many other commodities are. This is the background of the industry-specific tensions between capital and labor that have impelled managers and workers in the media industries toward specific forms of organization. In the words of Mark Banks (2007):

[M]aintaining a balance between standardized, controlled accumulation and preserving the unruly creativity, art and autonomy that makes creation of new commodities possible is the distinctive feature of cultural production, one that must be considered in any analysis of the cultural labour process. (Banks, 2007: 30, italics in original).

The structural conditions described above have formed the organizational structure and set the framework for how work and labor relations are organized in the media industry. They are also a part of the explanation of why work in the media industries is more casualized and based on temporary arrangements than in other sectors, because they create a flexibility that can spur creativity (but can also lead to precariousness and harsh working conditions).

Ursula Huws (2014) recently suggested that the structure of the media industries is rapidly changing, and is opening up to renegotiations about work and working conditions between capital and labor. As documented in much previous research, in reality, work in the media industries is not all “cool, creative, and egalitarian.” Employers can – and do – exploit the fact that there is a steady inflow of people who want to work in the media in order to hold back expectations on working conditions and salaries. The importance and role of media content in the economy of the media are also changing, along with transformations in the industrial structure of the media. As technology companies and large global conglomerates now increasingly dominate the sector (Huws, 2014), as new business models and forms of commodities are developed (such as “traffic commodities” [Van Couvering, 2011]), and since the supply of content is increasing (e.g., through amateur producers working for free [Fuchs, 2014]) creative workers are being reconstituted as “content producers” and are losing their bargaining power. As a result, there is plenty of evidence of an increasing casualization of labor (more freelancing and more work with little or no pay) and of poor working conditions, as well as of a lack of equality, both in regards to conditions within the industry and in gaining access to the media labor market (Lee, 2013). This development has parallels in other sectors of the labor market that are similarly affected by technological change (automatization) and by industrial re-organization; nevertheless, the specific conditions of work in the media and the general labor laws and policies (i.e., the laws and policies of the whole labor market) are responsible for creating the concrete relations of work in the media.

Media industries and labor market policy

My empirical analysis draws on four major changes in Swedish labor market policy that have occurred since the early 1990s: (1) the deregulation of staffing agencies, (2) changes in the Job Security Act, (3) policies concerning internships and work

placements, and (4) changing policy in relation to the unions. My aim is to unpack the general ideas within these policy shifts and to trace some of their consequences for the media industries. I analyze three aspects of each policy initiative: (A) What was the major content in the new policy? (B) How was the policy motivated (i.e., politically, bureaucratically, economically, or otherwise)? (C) What are the effects for the media industries and for media work in Sweden of the policy shift in question? The materials that I analyze consists of laws, policy documents, and governmental reports.

Staffing agencies

The first policy change that I discuss is the law on private employment agencies that was passed in the early 1990s and that made it legal for private companies to act as brokers and to offer staff on hire to companies (Lag 1991: 746, Lag 1993: 440). This kind of private staffing had been illegal in Sweden since the 1930s; however, motivated by the economic crisis and by the zeitgeist of the 1980s, the Social Democratic government opened the way for private staffing agencies in 1991, although these were strongly regulated. Two years later, in 1993, the policy was revised when a right-wing government came into office. In a motion titled “On deregulating the monopoly for employment agencies” (Prop. 1992/93: 218), almost all the previous regulations in this area were lifted. The only limitation that remained was that companies in this industry were not allowed to charge job-seekers for matching and leasing them to employers, but were only allowed to make profits from charging the employers. The regulation became one of the most liberal in Europe and the debate surrounding it was fierce, with strong critique from the unions and from the political parties on the left (Olofsdotter, 2008).

Allowing for private staffing agencies was motivated by the increasing need for “flexibility” on the labor market. The main idea is that staffing agencies work as brokers, renting out employees to various employers. Hiring temporary staff allows companies to minimize and outsource risks; in some sectors, it has led to permanent staff being laid off, and then hired back to their old jobs but on lower salaries and under less-secure conditions.

In the media industries, and specifically within journalism, staffing agencies have come to play a minor but not insignificant role. There are at least eight larger staffing agencies in Sweden that specialize in offering media workers for hire to media companies. Some of these agencies are external to the large media companies and conglomerates, while others are internal affiliated companies that exist within the media conglomerates. For example, all the major daily newspaper companies in Sweden have internal staffing agencies that make it possible to lay off staff at short no-

tice and move staff between different “brands” and media outlets within the company in a seamless way. According to a survey, about 7 percent of Swedish journalists are employed by the staffing industry (Werne, 2015b), although no available data exists for other parts of the media industry. In some symbolically important media workplaces, such as the major newspapers, the percentage of hired journalists from staffing agencies is higher (ibid.).

There have been extensive critiques from the unions organizing media workers against the use of staffing agencies. The unions view these agencies as a way for media industries to increase precariousness, impair working conditions, and cut wages. Regarding wage formation, there is evidence that wage trends in the staffing industry have consequences even for those who do not work in that industry. The salaries of employees in staffing agencies are significantly lower than those for permanent staff, a situation that may ultimately affect the entire pay structure. Hired journalists in the age group of 20–30 years, earn an average of 400 EUR less per month than their colleagues that are employed by the client companies. In the age group of 31–40 years, the average difference in pay is 500 EUR a month (Werne, 2015b). The median wage for Swedish journalists is 2700 EUR a month.

In addition to contributing to the deteriorating conditions and a change in wage formation in the media, staffing agencies contribute to changes in the journalistic profession as such. Being constantly leased out to new employers and – as is often the case – to employers who are located far from home makes it difficult for workers to maintain contacts, continuity, and local knowledge, all of which are often important tools in journalism. The system of temporary employment agencies may thus work with other trends in the industry to push the journalism industry further toward “desktop journalism.”

Changes in the Job Security Act

The second important shift that I discuss involves changes to the Job Security Act (Lag 1982: 80). This is a central piece of legislation on the Swedish labor market that was passed in 1974 after an initiative from the unions. The Job Security Act regulates grounds for dismissal and how redundancies should be handled. It also defines the types of employment that are allowed on the Swedish labor market.

In 2007, a new type of employment was introduced in the law: the so-called “general fixed-term employment.” This form of employment is controversial and has come under debate, since its critics state that fixed-term contracts make it easier to displace employees and to keep employees on temporary contracts with a low grade of job security for long periods of time (i.e., many years). The use of temporary employment increased significantly due to the changes in the Job Security Act, and

is now between 15 percent and 17 percent of all employees. Among young people, fixed-term employment is even more common; between 50 percent and 60 percent of employees between 20–24 years of age have a temporary position. The branch of the Swedish job market in which fixed-term employment is most common is “culture, entertainment, and leisure” (which includes some forms of media work); in this market, 45 percent of workers have a temporary work arrangement (Swedish Trade Union Confederation, 2016)

According to the proposition made by the government, the motivation for introducing fixed-term employment was to “increase flexibility”; the government also stated that

[T]ime-limited employment is also an important bridge into working life for young people and others with little or no work experience. High unemployment among young people and immigrants may be a consequence of employment protection being less flexible than what is required in today's modern working life and the current thresholds being too high (prop. 2005/06: 185).

The journalist's union was critical of this law from the beginning; in their referral to the original proposition, they dismissed the idea of introducing fixed-term employment into the Job Security Act.

In the media, the proportion of temporary employment is relatively high. This was so even before the introduction of the new form of employment. The Swedish model for the labor market leaves substantial room for the parties themselves to negotiate terms and conditions, and in many sectors, fixed-term contracts were a reality long before 2007, due to deals between unions and employers. However, the percentage of journalists who have temporary employment has clearly increased since the law was passed, and has gone from 11 percent (in 2000) to 18 percent (in 2014) (Werne, 2015a). This change only refers to employees with fixed-term contracts, however. Many of the people working in the media are temporary in the sense that they are freelancers or contractors working on temporary assignments. In journalism, 14 percent are freelancers, which means that overall, over a third of journalists have some form of temporary or fixed-term employment (ibid.).

Temporary employment is one of the main reasons behind the deterioration of working conditions in the media industries, since temporary employees hold a vulnerable position in relation to the employers. The constant chase for new assignments and the need to uphold and explore networks in order to remain employable have also been reported to be a reason for stress among media workers. Naturally, there are also clear benefits from temporary employments and short-term projects, which foster both a necessary flexibility and creativity. The new policy, however, tilted the balance between security and flexibility very strongly toward flexibility for the employers.

Workplace introduction and work experience

The third aspect of policy change that I discuss relates to an important and dominant form of unpaid and precarious work in the media industries: internships and work placements. This is a form of labor that has attracted recent attention in critical media and cultural studies (Corrigan, 2015; Figiel, 2013; Frenette, 2015).

The use of work placements and internships as a political tool to combat unemployment has been a part of labor market policies since the late 1970s, at least. In the 1979 governmental report “Employment policies for full employment,” internships are highlighted as an important tool in an increasingly professionalized economy in which young people have, according to the report, “an unrealistic picture of the realities of working life.” The original suggestion from the parliamentary committee behind the report was to create “internship” as a new juridical form of employment in order to increase contact between young people and the labor market, although that idea was never realized.

The Swedish labor market policy has had a tendency to emphasize education and retraining in combination with generous benefits as the main way of stimulating employment. The law on labor market programs (2000: 265) states that such programs will “strengthen the individual’s ability to get or keep a job.” Internships have historically been considered an inefficient method of introducing people into the workplace, as the training component within internships is too low. In addition, there have been concerns from legislators about “displacement effects”: that is, that interns (who are often working for free) may replace regular employees.

However, in the 2000s, there was a shift toward internships and work placements in policy directed toward unemployment. In 2009, the Swedish government invested 6.6 billion to provide for 53 000 internships. The motivation was to fight unemployment in the aftermath of the financial crisis that had occurred the previous year. Paradoxically, not even the government itself was convinced that the impact on employment would be more than marginal (as it would not significantly help the unemployed); nevertheless, the government moved forward with the investment since it considered that the investment would “maintain motivation and employability” among the unemployed (Prop. 2008/09: 97). This perspective points to the political and ideological shift that has occurred in policy in this area, in which unemployment has gone from being interpreted as a structural problem to being seen as an individual problem. For example, unemployment is generally no longer interpreted as an inherent feature of a capitalist mode of production, as the result of industrial organization during a given time period, or as a failure of social organization as such; rather, it is now interpreted as being due to problems with individuals’

motivation and lack of entrepreneurialism. Policies have therefore been developed accordingly, for example to address different forms of supply-oriented issues (lower wages, deregulation) and to address the so-called “activation” of individual job-seekers (Bengtsson & Berglund, 2012).

However, the increased influx of interns, trainees, and people on work placement within the Swedish media labor market is not only connected to changing labor market policies; it is also strongly connected to policies on higher education. Changes in universities during the last decade have included a greater focus on so-called “employability”. Due to this policy shift, work placements and internships have increasingly become a part of university courses. The European Bologna Process also pushes in the direction of increased “employability.” In Sweden, this concept materialized in the form of the 2004 government proposition titled “New world – new university” (Prop. 2004/05: 162). Following this proposition, the issue of the employability of university students has become a more pressing concern, and many universities have developed courses and study programs that are more directly linked to the demands of the labor market. It has also become increasingly common to include representatives from the industry in university boards and in governing organs for specific study programs and courses at universities.

Since the 1990s, there has been a rapid growth in media, journalism, and communication courses within higher education. Although one explanation for this growth is the expansion of higher education in general, a more important explanation is the increased marketization of higher education. In 1993, the law was changed (Prop. 1992/93: 1) so that every university could decide for itself what courses and programs to offer, without any coordination or control by the government. Later in the same year, the financing model for higher education was reformed (Prop. 1992/93: 169) such that resources were allocated to the universities according to a market-based system. Student demand for the courses at each specific university became the foundation for how the state allocated resources among the universities. This created an incentive to offer courses that the universities thought would be in popular demand and would attract students; media courses were one type of educational offering that the universities rapidly took to the market. Although this change has been gradual, there has been a steady increase in different media education programs at universities since the late 1990s. In 2013, it was reported that graduates in journalism had increased by 400% over a 10-year period (Andersson, 2013). About 2500 people in Sweden start a media program at a university every semester, and the majority do some kind of internship or work placement as part of their training. From reviewing course descriptions from Swedish universities, I have estimated that about 1500–2000 students from media programs do a period of work placement or an internship (usually 3–6 months) every semester.¹

These policy changes have a direct impact on the media industries in that they have gradually created a greater influx of interns and work-placement workers into editorial offices and other media workplaces. This could have positive and enriching consequences; however, it could also increase stress among the employees who must serve as instructors and mentors to the young and inexperienced interns. Of course, it is economically favorable, since interns and work-placement workers usually work for free or for a very low wage. An estimate is that 3000 interns perform about 2.4 million working hours in the media industries in Sweden each year;² if these were to be salaried positions according to starting wages in journalism (i.e., 14 EUR per hour) it would add up to a wage cost for the industry of about 29 million EUR per year. This sum is now often indirectly covered by the state (through unemployment benefits or student loans) or by the interns themselves.

Changing policy on unions and unemployment funds

Another important policy shift is in how political decisions and regulatory changes have helped to transform the trade union movement's role in regards to media labor. Most of the specific rules regarding the labor market in Sweden are shaped by negotiations between parties – that is, between the labor unions and the employers' associations; therefore, the size and strength of the unions representing the employees are central to how these rules are designed.

Trade unions have played a central role in the Swedish or Scandinavian model. As mentioned above, the rate of unionization has been much higher in Sweden than in most other European countries, and the clear majority of workers have traditionally been members of the union. Although the Swedish trade union movement is still strong, the level of unionization has decreased in recent decades (Kjellberg, 2001). A radical shift occurred in 2007, when the conservative government carried through a policy shift that resulted in a substantial increase in union member fees – from an average of 10 EUR in 2006 to an average of 35 EUR in 2007 – while simultaneously eliminating the right to tax reduction for membership fees of trade unions. (The right to tax reduction for membership in an employer organization still remains, however, and employers are now better organized than workers.)

In the government's proposition titled "Unemployment insurance for employment," these changes were motivated by politicians who considered that previous policies in this area were flawed. According to the government, the problem lay in a too-strong belief among politicians and policy-makers that social security for the unemployed, education and support for career transitions, and active policies for stimulating job growth (e.g., through public consumption) were the most effective tools to "break the exclusion of the unemployed" (Prop. 2006/2007: 15). Instead, the gov-

ernment considered that “incentives” were needed to prompt people to take the available jobs and to make it “more profitable to work”; that is, by lowering taxes, cutting social security, and so forth. Therefore, a range of measures were deployed in order to make it more difficult to obtain access to unemployment insurance and to make it more expensive to be a member of the union.

The effects were immediate. The unions lost about 10% of their members in a matter of months (Kjellberg, 2009). Unionization in the media industries was also affected. Most of the unions that organize journalists and other media workers have seen a decline in recent years, while the union that organizes people in information, communication, and PR has grown. This shift may mirror a general development, in which more media workers move to these sectors, considering the crisis in journalism and in the established mass media. However, Gunnar Nygren (2010) points out that the journalist union has had difficulty organizing and recruiting new members among younger journalists, especially outside of the large daily newspapers and public broadcasters. The decline in unionization among workers in the media industries makes these workers far more vulnerable and makes it difficult to resist, for example, the worsening of working conditions or the use of staffing agencies. Furthermore, the journalist union has a more general role in defending the profession as such, for example, by developing and enforcing ethical codes among journalists. A weakening of the unions thus opens the way to an increase in the de-professionalization of journalistic practice.

Discussion

As noted in the previous overview of some of the most important policy issues in relation to labor and the labor market in Sweden during the last decade, the general tendencies of increased “flexibility” have had the following clear effects in relation to media and journalism:

- Through de-regulation, the staffing industry has become a major employer of journalists and other media producers.
- Changes in the Job Security Act have enabled the establishment of a large proportion of temporary workers, for example in television production, where such workers make up as many as a third of all employees.
- A focus on “employability” and “motivation” in both unemployment and higher education policy has created a strong influx of interns and work placements as a form of (almost) unpaid labor in the media industries.
- Regulatory changes regarding trade unions have had an impact on the degree of organization among workers in the media, thereby weakening the unions.

The increase in flexibility has had consequences for practical and everyday production within media companies: It has led to an increase in inexperienced and casual workers and decreased continuity in editorial offices. The increased rate of temporary employment through staffing agencies supports and contributes to the rise of “desktop journalism” and increases dependence on “elite sources” in journalism, since maintaining a contact network and local knowledge is more difficult when working temporarily and far from home, as temporary staff often do. The lower rate of unionized labor reduces employee influence and favors business owners and management. Empirical research into working conditions in the Swedish media industries has shown a higher degree of precariousness, more stressful work environments, and a tendency of de-professionalization across the industry (Witschge & Nygren, 2009). These changes may also have direct effects on the media economy: Interns, who are subsidized directly or indirectly by governmental support systems (i.e., student loans, unemployment benefits, etc.) can be seen as an indirect industry support that is estimated at about 29 million EUR per year. The effect of weaker unions and staffing agencies on wage formation may also favor employees and increase profitability.

To conclude, the analysis of labor market policy in this article shows that changes in media work environments and in the contract relations between employers and employees in the media industry do not only result from general economic transformations in the media (e.g., that traditional media companies make less profit) or from technological change (e.g., digitization). Reforms in labor law have also had a bearing on employment contracts and on working conditions in the media. Labor market policy can thus be understood as a form of “latent” media policy (Braman, 2004; Freedman, 2008): a policy that is not primarily aimed at regulating media and journalism, but that nevertheless has a great effect on this area. The reforms discussed in this article are part of the neoliberal “paradigm shifts” in European labor market policy and of the general push for the deregulation of labor markets, as documented in previous research (Wilthagen & Tros, 2004). The arguments in support of the policy changes, as mentioned in the analysis of Swedish policy, are “greater flexibility,” “greater employability,” “lower thresholds to the labor market,” and “more incentives.” These changes have resulted in a general deterioration of working conditions with possible negative effects on journalism as such. For those aiming at a better understanding of the nature of media work and of the possibilities for transforming media work for the better, a more detailed analysis of the role of law and policy would be beneficial, and more comparative work across Europe is necessary.

NOTES

- ¹ Through the national database for higher education (studera.nu), I retracted all courses in media and communication studies, as well as in journalism and other neighboring fields, from 2015. I focused only on the longer courses, such as 3-year Bachelor programs. From the universities' websites, I downloaded the syllabuses and course descriptions. From the national database for higher education, I retracted information on how many students were registered to each course in the sample. From the combination of these data, it was possible to obtain a broad assessment or an estimate of the number of students that undertake an internship every year. Of course, this estimate is uncertain; for example, the number of registered students can differ from the number of actual students that participate in courses and, in many of the courses in the sample, it is possible for students to replace an internship with studies abroad or with courses at other universities (even though this is not a particularly popular option for most students, in my experience).
- ² This estimate comes from the fact that 1500–2000 university students do a period of internship as part of their education each year (see above). There are also numerous media programs at gymnasiums, private schools, evening schools, and folk high schools (somewhat similar to community colleges, but operated by civil society organizations) that feature internships as part of their training. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for those who are willing to enter the media industries to do a period of self-organized unsalaried interning (or volunteering). It is therefore probable that such groups are at least as large as those entering internship through a university course. In general, internships are about 4–6 months long (or sometimes longer). I have calculated the working time based on a 5-month internship (800 working hours × 3000 interns = 2 400 000 million hours).

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Politika tržišta rada i medijski rad u Švedskoj

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SAŽETAK

Cilj ovog rada je analizirati neke nedavne promjene u politici tržišta rada i radnog prava kako bi se pokazalo kako su promjene te vrste regulative imale posljedice za rad u medijskim industrijama. Iako je tijekom posljednjeg desetljeća proveden značajni broj istraživanja o medijskom radu, prilično je neuobičajeno u kritičnim medijskim studijama povezati takvo istraživanje s politikom i regulacijom. Ono što želim naglasiti ovim člankom jest da se povećani prekarni rad i deprofesionalizacija koja se događa unutar medijskog rada, kao što je dokumentirano u ranijem istraživanju, moraju razumijevati u skladu s političkim promjenama i političkim odlukama, a ne da se na njih gleda samo kao na ekonomske ili tehnološke pomake unutar medijske industrije. Ovaj rad stoga doprinosi trenutnom znanju o odnosima između politike tržišta rada i medijske industrije u Švedskoj te kao takav doprinosi trenutnom znanju o tim odnosima u nordijskoj socijalnoj državi, sa svim svojim posebnostima i razlikama od drugih dijelova Europe i svijeta. Međutim, rezultati i rasprava u ovom članku povezani su i općenito važni za europska nastojanja u području politike tržišta rada, kao i medija.

Ključne riječi: medijski rad, medijska proizvodnja, politika tržišta rada, neplaćeni rad, besplatni rad, pripravnništvo