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## Two experiments focusing on de-escalation oriented coverage of post-war conflicts<sup>1</sup>

**Kurzfassung:** Kriegsberichterstattung hat einen starken Bias in Richtung auf Polarisierung der Konfliktparteien, Feindbildkonstruktion und Konflikteskalation. In abgeschwächter Form lebt dieser Bias oft über das Ende des Krieges hinaus fort und verzerrt auch noch die Nachkriegsberichterstattung. Selbst nach Kriegsende ist es nur eine Minderheit der Journalisten, welche in einer mehr deeskalations- oder versöhnungsorientierten Weise berichten. Haben sie eine Chance, die Öffentlichkeit zu erreichen? Werden ihre Berichte vom Publikum als ausgewogener und weniger verzerrt gewürdigt? Haben Sie einen Einfluss auf die mentalen Modelle, nach welchen das Publikum den Konflikt interpretiert? Oder hält das Publikum an Vorurteilen fest und lehnt Zeitungsartikel ab, die nicht den Feindbildern entsprechen, die sich während des Krieges entwickelt haben?

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht diese Fragen in Form von zwei experimentellen Studien.

Im ersten Experiment wurden n=128 Probanden (repräsentativ für die Leserschaft der deutschen Qualitätspresse) Zeitungsartikel über 3 Ereignisse im früheren Jugoslawien nach dem Sturz Miloševićs vorgelegt: (1) gewalttätige Übergriffe in Süd-Serbien (Dezember 2000), (2) die Auslieferung Miloševićs an Den Haag (Juni 2001) und (3) der Staatsvertrag zwischen Serbien und Montenegro (März 2003). Zu jedem dieser Ereignisse wurden vier verschiedene Arten von Artikeln benutzt: moderat eskalationsorientierte Artikel von prestigeträchtigen Deutschen Zeitungen (*Die Welt*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*) und 3 Varianten dieser Artikel, (a) mit verstärkt eskalationsorientiertem Framing, (b) mit moderat deeskalationsorientiertem Framing und (c) mit stärker deeskalationsorientiertem Framing der Ereignisse.

Jeder Proband musste jeweils einen Artikel zu jedem der drei Ereignisse in chronologischer Reihenfolge lesen und nach jedem Artikel (a) die berichteten Ereignisse in seinen eigenen Worten nacherzählen und (b) einen Fragebogen ausfüllen, der messen sollte, inwieweit der Artikel als unverzerrt, ausgeglichen, interessant etc. akzeptiert wurde. Die mentalen Modelle nach welchen die Probanden die Ereignisse interpretierten wurden mittels quantitativer Inhaltsanalyse aus ihren Nacherzählungen abgeleitet.

Im zweiten Experiment wurde nur die Akzeptanz der Artikel gemessen, aber nicht ihr Einfluss auf die mentalen Modelle der Leser. Ansonsten wurden der gleiche Versuchsaufbau und die gleichen Instrumente benutzt, allerdings mit gewissen Modifikationen: Die Originalartikel stammten von einer Österreichischen Regionalzeitung (Vorarlberger Nachrichten) und die Versuchspersonengruppe (N=126) wurde aus deren Leserschaft rekrutiert. Die Berichte über den Staatsvertrag zwischen Serbien und Montenegro wurden durch Berichte über Kostunicas Reaktion auf Rugovas Sieg in den Kosovo-Wahlen (November 2000) ersetzt, und die stärker deeskalationsorientierten Textversionen wurden durch eskalationsorientierte Varianten mit umgekehrter Parteilichkeit (pro Serbien) ersetzt.

Die Ergebnisse der Studien sprechen zugunsten des Projekts Friedensjournalismus. Deeskalationsorientierte Zeitungsartikel wurden niemals weniger akzeptiert als die anderen Textversionen.

Bei dem Textmaterial aus der Qualitätspresse und ihrer Leserschaft wurden sie sogar eher akzeptiert und resultierten in weniger stark polarisierten mentalen Modellen.

Bei dem Textmaterial aus der Provinzpresse und ihrer Leserschaft konnte kein Unterschied bezüglich der Akzeptanz der verschiedenen Textversionen gefunden werden. Die Befunde deuten zudem darauf hin, dass das provinzielle Publikum sich weniger für die post-jugoslawischen Angelegenheiten interessierte und von traditionellen Einflussfaktoren der Nachrichten wie Personalisierung und Negativität stärker beeinflusst wurde.

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1. The present paper is an outcome of the Toda Institute's Peace Journalism Project and was funded by the German Peace Research Foundation (DSF) and the Research Council of the University of Konstanz (AFF).

*Abstract:* War coverage has a strong bias towards the promotion of conflict escalation and – though less pronounced – this bias often survives in post-war coverage as well. Even after the end of war, only a minority of journalists frame conflict in a firmly de-escalation oriented way. Do they have a chance to reach the public? Will their reports be respected by the audience as more balanced and unbiased? Will they have an impact on the audience's mental models of the conflict? Or will the Milošević audience continue to cling to its prejudices and reject news articles which do not affirm the enemy images that emerged during wartime?

The present paper investigates these questions by means of two experimental studies.

In the first experiment, news articles on three events in former Yugoslavia after the fall of Milošević were presented to a total of  $n = 128$  subjects, representative of the readership of the German quality press: (1) violent conflicts in Southern Serbia (December 2000), (2) the extradition of Milošević to The Hague (June, 2001) and (3) the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (March 2003). For each of the events, four different types of articles were used: moderately escalation oriented articles from prestigious German newspapers (*Die Welt*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*) and three variants of these articles, (a) with increased escalation-oriented framing, (b) with moderate de-escalation oriented framing and (c) with more strongly de-escalation oriented framing of the events.

Each subject was asked to read one article on each of the three events in chronological order and after each article (a) to narrate the reported events in their own words and (b) to fill out a questionnaire designed to measure the acceptance of the articles as unbiased, well-balanced, interesting, etc. The subjects' mental models of the reported events were inferred from their narratives by means of quantitative content analysis.

The second experiment measured the acceptance of the articles only, but not their impact on the readers' mental models. Besides that, it employed the same design and used the same instruments, but with some modifications: The original articles stemmed from an Austrian regional paper (*Vorarlberger Nachrichten*), and the sample of subjects ( $n = 126$ ) was recruited from its readership. The reports about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro were replaced by reports about Kostunica's reaction to Rugova's victory in the Kosovo elections (November, 2000), and the more strongly de-escalation oriented text versions were replaced by escalation-oriented ones with reversed partiality (pro Serbia).

The results of the studies speak in favor of the peace journalism project. De-escalation oriented news articles were never accepted to a lesser degree than the other text versions.

With text material from the quality press and its readership, they were even accepted to a higher degree and resulted in less polarized mental models of the events.

With text material from the provincial press and its readership, no difference could be found with respect to the acceptance of the various texts versions. The results indicate, moreover, that the provincial audience was less interested in post-Yugoslavian affairs and more strongly influenced by traditional news factors like personalization and negativism.

## 1. Introduction

Journalists do not simply report on the world, they also assign meaning to the facts they report and interpret them according to a particular cognitive framework. In the case of conflict, this framework may be either escalation oriented or de-escalation oriented. An escalation oriented framework is guided by the questions: "Who is the aggressor?" and "How can he be stopped?" It tends to take sides and to polarize conflict. A de-escalation oriented framework, on the other hand, is guided by the questions: "What are the issues?" and "How can they be resolved?" It tends to take an impartial stance and tries to depolarize conflict (Kempf, 2003).

During war and crisis, an escalation oriented framework often becomes so dominant that war reporting and propaganda no longer make any difference (Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2001; Kempf & Luostarinen, 2002). Not only do the conflict parties' own media display this trend, the international media also do so. War coverage has a strong bias towards the promotion of conflict escalation and – though less pronounced – this bias often survives in post-war coverage as well (Annabring, 2000; Hamdorf, 2001; Wolfsfeld, 2004). Even in the postwar period only a minority of journalists frame conflict in a firmly de-escalation oriented way.

The concepts of peace journalism, as created by Galtung (1998, 2002) and others (Lynch, 2000, 2002; McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000; Bilke, 2002, 2005; Kempf, 2002, 2003; Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2003), are intended to counteract this bias at each stage of conflict: pre-war, war and post-war. Whether these concepts are realistic depends – besides other factors – on audience responses to peace journalism. Does peace journalism have a chance to reach the public? Will it be respected by its audience as more balanced and unbiased? Will it have an impact on the mental models according to which the audience interprets the conflict? Or will the audience hold onto its prejudices and reject news articles inconsistent with the enemy images that emerged during wartime?

There are several constraints that may have an impact on audience responses to peace journalism:

The first of these constraints is *the level of conflict escalation*, which progresses from a self-centered divergence of perspectives via competition to struggle and climaxes in open warfare. Inter-group conflict strengthens in-group solidarity. Group members who stand out in opposing the enemy can thereby increase their social status. Group members identify more strongly with their own group and its positions, and the more escalated the conflict, the more they are likely to do this (Deutsch, 1973).

The second constraint is *the cognitive framework* which corresponds to these levels of conflict escalation and which interprets conflict by means of increasingly radicalized mental models (Kempf, 2002) that can be described along the dimensions of (a) the conceptualization of the conflict as a win-win, win-lose or lose-lose process, (b) the assessment of the parties' rights and aims, (c) the evaluation of their actions and behavior and (d) the emotional consequences of these interpretations, which ultimately transform outrage at war into outrage at the enemy.

A third constraint is *the audience's entanglement in the conflict*, which will be greater, the more reprehensible the atrocities and the closer a society feels itself tied to one of the parties in historical, political and cultural terms. The more it is entangled, the more an audience will tend to identify with one of the parties, and the more it will tend to interpret the conflict according to the same mental model accepted by the party it favors. According to Taylor (2000), however, the media must not deviate too much from the perspective of their audience if they want their reports to continue to be read, to be listened to or to be watched.

It is particularly in long-lasting, intractable conflicts that such mental models solidify into *societal beliefs*. Intractable conflicts are demanding, stressful, painful, exhausting and costly, both in human and in material terms. This requires that societal members develop conditions which will enable them to cope successfully. Societal beliefs fulfill an important role in the creation of these psychological conditions. Since they are both part of society's ethos and a crucial factor for enduring the burdens of war, they will tend to persist after the war is over (Bar-Tal, 1998).

A fifth constraint is the *text genre*. (a) Features or reportages offer more space for the assessment of the conflict context, both in escalation and in de-escalation oriented terms than do short commentaries or news articles with a stronger focus on day-to-day events. (b) Nationwide quality papers have a stronger focus on international affairs and more possibilities for journalistic investigation than regional papers that base their articles mainly on the reports of news agencies, etc.

A sixth constraint is *the audience and its interaction with journalism*. (a) Journalists' assumptions about audience preferences (Bläsi, forthcoming) and traditional news factors like "simplification vs. complexity," "negative vs. positive," "personal vs. structural," "elite vs. non-elite nations" and "elite vs. non-elite persons" (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Östgaard, 1965; Merten, 1985; Eilders, 1997; Allan, 1999) are more compatible with escalation oriented than with de-escalation oriented coverage. Simplification supports the division of the world into "us" and "them" and produces a bias towards interpreting conflict as a win-lose process (Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2003), and the preference for negativism, personalization, elite nations and elite persons produces a structural frame which divides the world into "rich" and

"poor" and at the same time into "good" and "evil" (Galtung & Vincent, 1992). (b) The typical readership of provincial papers is less interested in and feels less involved in international affairs than the readership of the quality press. Taking the format of the provincial press into account, they can also be expected to be less well informed about international affairs.

## 2. Hypotheses

A number of hypotheses can be derived from these assumptions.

1. The more escalated a conflict is, the less positive will be audience responses to de-escalation oriented coverage.
  - 1.1. In post-war situations, de-escalation oriented coverage has a better chance to evoke positive responses than during the war.
  - 1.2. The more polarized the frames of conflict interpretation were during the war, however, the less positive will be responses to de-escalation oriented post-war coverage.
2. The more entangled the audience is, the less positive will be its responses to de-escalation oriented coverage.
  - 2.1. De-escalation oriented post-war coverage has a better chance to evoke positive responses in societies which were not directly involved in the conflict.
  - 2.2. De-escalation oriented post-war coverage has a better chance to evoke a positive response in societies which did not side with one of the conflict parties.
3. The more it interprets conflict according to mental models dissonant with the societal beliefs that emerged during wartime, the less positive will be the response to de-escalation oriented coverage.
  - 3.1. De-escalation oriented post-war coverage has a better chance to evoke positive responses if it is rather moderate and mainly takes the edge off the escalation-oriented frames of interpretation that still prevail,
  - 3.2. while the chance of arousing a positive response is reduced if post-war coverage interprets the situation within a more radically reversed framework.
4. The text genre constrains the intensity of both escalation and de-escalation oriented conflict coverage.
  - 4.1. Responses to escalation and de-escalation oriented post-war coverage will be more differentiated if the coverage exploits the possibilities offered by the format of a feature or a reportage than when it is constrained by the format of a news article or a short commentary.
  - 4.2. Responses to escalation and de-escalation oriented post-war coverage will be more differentiated if the coverage exploits the possibilities offered by the format of the quality press than when it is constrained by the format of a provincial paper.
5. Whether there is a difference in responses to escalation and de-escalation oriented post-war coverage also depends on the audience and its interaction with journalism.
  - 5.1. The typical readership of the quality press will respond to escalation and de-escalation oriented post-war coverage in a more differentiated way than the typical readership of provincial papers.
  - 5.2. Escalation-oriented coverage is better suited to the purpose of arousing audience interest.

## 3. The original experiment

In order to test these hypotheses, a series of experimental studies was designed which measure responses to escalation- and de-escalation oriented coverage along two dimensions: (1) Audience acceptance of coverage, and (2) the impact of coverage on the audience's mental models of the conflict.

### 3.1 Goals and conditions

The first of the experiments (Annabring, Ditmann & Kempf, 2005; Bläsi, Jaeger, Kempf & Spohrs, 2005) was designed to test hypotheses 3.1, 3.2 and 5.2 under conditions which were quite optimal for positive responses to de-escalation oriented coverage with respect to hypotheses 1.1, 4.2 and 5.1:

*Ad 1.1:* The text material used dealt with post-war conflicts in former Yugoslavia after the fall of Milošević;

*Ad 4.2:* the text format corresponded to that of the nationwide German quality press; and

*Ad 5.1:* the sample of subjects was representative of its readership.

With respect to hypotheses 4.1 and 2.2, on the other hand, the conditions were much less favorable:

*Ad 4.1:* The text genre was that of news articles and/or short commentaries; and

*Ad 2.2:* German diplomacy had supported Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia in their struggles for independence even before the outbreak of war in Slovenia.

Nonetheless, the conditions were relatively moderate with respect to hypotheses 2.1 and 1.2:

*Ad 1.1:* Although Germany accepted tens of thousands of refugees from the Balkans during the war, and although the German military finally did become involved in the war against Serbia in Kosovo, German society itself was not directly affected by the war and did not suffer its atrocities; and

*Ad 1.2:* Although public discourse in Germany constructed morally opposed roles for the various parties in the post-Yugoslavian civil wars (with the Serbs receiving the role of chief perpetrators and the Bosnian Muslims and the Albanian minority the victim role), it never completely identified with either side, but to the contrary sympathized with the international community and in the end held Milošević chiefly responsible (Kempf, 1999; Jaeger, 2000; Luostarinen & Kempf, 2000; Anna-bring & Jaeger, 2005).

### 3.2 Experimental design

News articles on three events in former Yugoslavia after the fall of Milošević were presented to a total of 128 subjects, representative of the readership of the German quality press:

E1: violent conflicts in Southern Serbia (December 2000),

E2: the extradition of Milošević to The Hague (June 2001) and

E3: the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (March 2003).

Four different types of articles on each of the events were used: a moderately escalation oriented article (o) from a prestigious German newspaper (cf. Table 1) and three variants of these articles, a variant with increased escalation-oriented framing (e) which interpreted the events as a win-lose process and added further information to the text which put the events into a negative context and/or incriminated the Serbian party; a variant with moderate de-escalation oriented framing (d1) which stayed as close as possible to the original text and only took the edge off its escalation oriented framing; and a variant with a more strongly de-escalation oriented framing of the events (d2) which changed the structure of the text completely and added further information, situating the events in a more constructive context. The average text length was 453 words.<sup>1</sup>

	Event	Title	Source
<b>E1</b>	Conflict in Southern Serbia	Wer kämpft wann gegen wen im Presevo-Tal? (Who is fighting whom in the Presovo Valley?)	<i>Die Welt</i> , 12-19-2000
<b>E2</b>	Extradition of Milošević to The Hague	Der Sloba-Faktor (The Sloba-Factor)	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i> , 6-29-2001
<b>E3</b>	Treaty between Serbia and Montenegro	Aus Jugoslawien wird Serbien-Montenegro (Yugoslavia becomes Serbia-Montenegro)	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> , 3-15-2003

Table 1: The original articles used in the study

The subjects were asked to read one article on each of the three events in chronological order and after each article

1. to narrate the reported events in their own words and
2. to fill out a questionnaire designed to measure their acceptance of the articles as unbiased, well-balanced, interesting, etc.

Combining each text version with each version of the other texts resulted in  $4^3 = 64$  combinations of event x variants, each of which was administered to a male and to a female subject. The experiment thus resulted in a sample of  $n = 64 \times 2 \times 3 = 384$  narratives and questionnaires on which the data analysis was based.

### 3.3 Instruments and methods of data analysis

Acceptance of the articles was assessed by means of a 16-item questionnaire, to which Latent Class Analysis was applied in order to identify typical evaluation-patterns. Four of the items dealt with the entertainment value of the articles, asking the subjects to assess how boring (I1), how interesting (I2), how sensational (I3) and how informative (I4) the articles

1. For the details of text construction see Bläsi, Jaeger, Kempf & Spohrs (2005).

appeared to them. Next the subjects were asked to indicate how familiar they had previously been with the reported events (I5) and to evaluate whether the events were depicted in a factually correct way (I6), whether the text included impartial information about all the parties involved (I7) or whether it favored one of the parties (I8), whether the text was understandable (I9) and whether it brought up new aspects (I10), whether they could approve of the article's content (I11), whether it stimulated their interest in further information (I12), whether it was hard to read the text to the end (I13) and whether the reported facts were depicted truthfully or in a distorted way (I14). Finally, the subjects were asked to estimate the journalist's expertise (I15) and his stylistic competence (I16).

The subjects' mental models of the reported events were inferred from their narratives by means of quantitative content analysis. Again, this was a two-step procedure which first coded the narratives according to a number of content analytical variables and then applied Latent Class Analysis in order to identify the mental models upon which the narratives were based.

In order to do so, the depiction of each of the four parties involved in the reported conflicts, Serbia / Yugoslavia, the international community, the Albanian minority in Serbia and Montenegro, was coded by a total of 20 variables.

The first set of variables describes whether the following features are attributed to the parties: confrontational (V1) and/or cooperative behavior (V2), insight into the price to be paid for a confrontational (V3) and/or for a cooperative conflict strategy (V4), insight into the gains from a confrontational (V5) and/or from a cooperative conflict strategy (V6), confrontational logic and readiness for confrontation (V7) and/or cooperative logic and readiness for cooperation (V8), questioning (V9) and/or approval of common goals and needs (V10), pursuit of egoistical goals (V11), demands for flexibility and/or (V12) unyieldingness (V13), questioning or violation (V14) and/or readiness for or support of democracy and human rights (V15).

The second set of variables describes whether the parties' behavior was justified or (at least) evaluated in an unbiased way (V16) and/or whether it was condemned or criticized (V17), whether the narrative referred to victims on the side of the respective party (V18) and whether it dissociated from the party's political elites or society members (V19) and/or whether it identified with them (V20).

### 3.4 Results

The results of the study show that the de-escalation oriented text versions were accepted to a greater degree and resulted in less polarized mental models of the events than the original articles and the escalation oriented text versions.

#### 3.4.1 Acceptance

Latent Class Analysis of the questionnaire data identified 6 typical evaluation patterns, one of which (K1.5) is characterized by widespread *non-responses to the questions referring to the entertainment value* of the articles. With respect to the other items it is about the same as the average evaluation.<sup>1</sup>

- This evaluation pattern was found in the evaluation of all text-versions (cf. Figure 2) and, irrespectively of the reported event (cf. Figure 1), with about the same frequency of 10% to 14% (total = 12.3%),
- It is characteristic of a small group of readers to whom qualities like "sensational" or "boring" are seemingly irrelevant for the evaluation of news texts.

The other evaluation patterns indicate more differentiated responses both to reports about different events (cf. Figure 1) and to different text versions (cf. Figure 2) and can be grouped according to the interest in further information which the articles aroused:

- Strong interest in further information (K1.3),
- Relatively strong interest in further information (K1.1 and K1.2) and
- Lack of interest in further information (K1.4 and K1.6)

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1. For a more detailed description of the evaluation patterns see Bläsi, Jaeger, Kempf & Spohrs (2005).

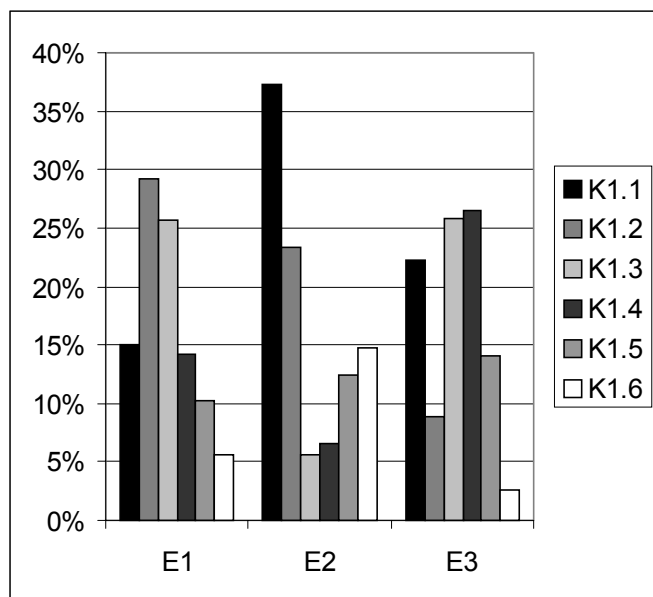


Figure 1: Frequency of the evaluation patterns as a function of the reported events.  $\chi^2=75.74$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p<0.001$ .  
E1 = Conflict in Southern Serbia; E2 = Extradition of Milošević;  
E3 = Treaty between Serbia and Montenegro

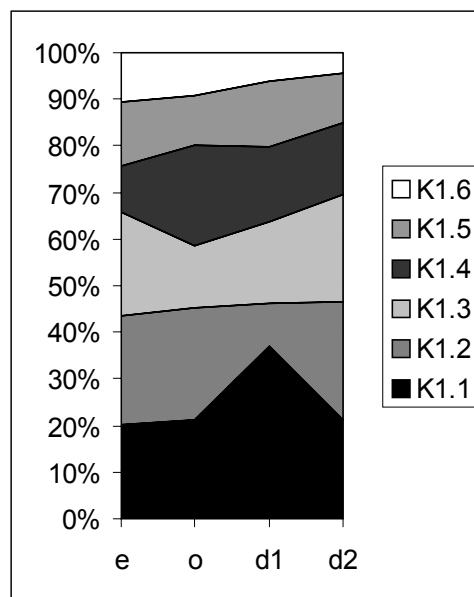


Figure 2: Frequency of the evaluation patterns as a function of the various text-versions.  $\chi^2=26.87$ ,  $df=15$ ,  $p<0.05$ .  
e = escalation oriented ; o = original article; d1 = moderately de-escalation oriented ; d2 = more strongly de-escalation oriented

**Strong interest in further information:** Evaluation pattern K1.3 assesses the articles as informative and finds that new aspects are brought up in an impartial way. This arouses interest in further information, but at the same time it also creates uncertainty as to whether the reported facts are depicted truthfully and accurately.

- This evaluation pattern refers most frequently to text versions d2 (23.1%) and e (22.4%), which indicates that hypothesis 5.2 can be rejected (cf. Figure 2). Escalation-oriented coverage is not the only type that can arouse audience interest, de-escalation oriented coverage can also do so.
- Another widespread belief about news values and audience preferences also needs to be reconsidered: the dominant news value of personal events (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Merten 1985; Eilders, 1997; Allan, 1999; Galtung 2002). The high frequency (25.8%) with which this evaluation pattern applies to reports about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (E3) (cf. Figure 1) indicates that structural themes can also arouse audience interest.

Independent of the text version, *relatively strong interest in further information* (K1.1 + K1.2) was found in 43.8% of the questionnaires (cf. Figure 2). While pattern K1.1 consistently evaluates the articles positively, however, pattern K1.2 doubts their impartiality and truthfulness.

In accordance with hypotheses 3.1 and 3.2, the moderately de-escalation oriented text versions (d1) provoked less doubt than the more strongly de-escalation oriented ones (d2),

- while, on the other hand, the de-escalation oriented framing of versions d2 was still moderate enough not to provoke more doubt than the original articles (o) and their escalation-oriented versions (e), which were both more in accordance with societal beliefs that had emerged during the post-Yugoslavian civil wars (cf. Figure 2).
- Nonetheless, and in accordance with hypothesis 3.2, the greatest amount of doubt was aroused by reports about the violent conflicts in Southern Serbia (E1), which did not easily fit into the old enemy image of the "good Albanians" against the "evil Serbs" (cf. Wolfer, 2001) (cf. Figure 1).

*Lack of interest in further information* is characteristic of evaluation patterns K1.4 and K1.6. While pattern K1.4 evaluates the articles rather positively, K1.6 is rather negative about them.

- Altogether, lack of interest in further information (K1.4 + K1.6) was found most frequently in reaction to the original articles (30.9%) and in only 20.8% of the other text versions (cf. Figure 2).
- When combined with negative evaluations of the articles (K1.6), it decreases steadily the less escalation oriented and the more de-escalation oriented the articles are (cf. Figure 2),

- and, finally, it was least frequently found in the evaluation of articles about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (E3) (cf. Figure 1).

Again, this indicates that beliefs about news values need to be reconsidered. At least the relatively sophisticated readership of the quality press seems to offer a potential market for a peace journalism which refrains from polarization and personalization, also reports on structural topics and frames conflict in a more constructive way. But can such a peace journalism actually influence audiences and their interpretations of conflict?

### 3.4.2 Mental models

Computed separately for each of the four conflict parties, Latent Class Analysis of the content-analytical data identified several classes of narratives which reflect the different mental models with which the subjects interpreted the events reported in the articles they read.

#### Serbia / Yugoslavia

With respect to the perception of Serbia / Yugoslavia, six classes of narrative (K2.1 – K2.6) were identified which demonstrate that the escalation vs. de-escalation oriented framing of the news articles had a definite influence on the mental models with which the subjects interpreted events:<sup>1</sup>

K2.1: Appreciation of democratic change in Serbia,

K2.2: Continuation of the old enemy image,

K2.3: Appreciation of the new start in Serbia,

K2.4: Criticism of the Serbian past,

K2.5: Refusal to acknowledge democratic change in Serbia,

K2.6: Unbiased assessment of (present) Serbian positions.

Two of these classes are typical of the narratives about the conflict in Southern Serbia (E1) (cf. Figure 3): Continuation of the old enemy image (K2.2), which inspired 57.6% of these narratives, and an unbiased assessment of (present) Serbian positions (K2.6, 32.5%).

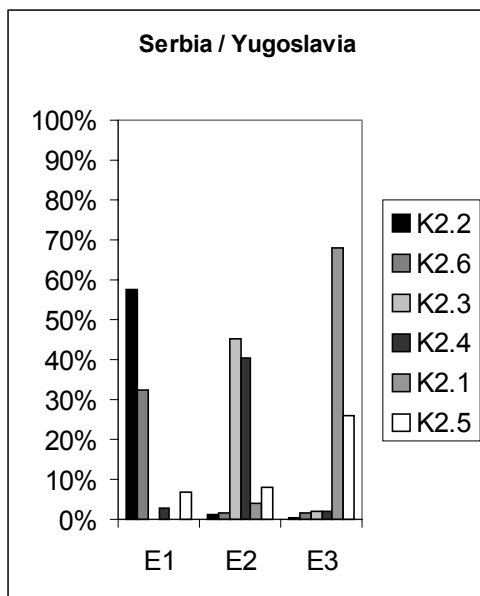


Figure 3: Class size as a function of the reported events.  
 $\chi^2 = 571.200$ ,  $df = 10$ ,  $p < 0.001$   
E1 = Conflict in Southern Serbia; E2 = Extradition of Milošević;  
E3 = Treaty between Serbia and Montenegro

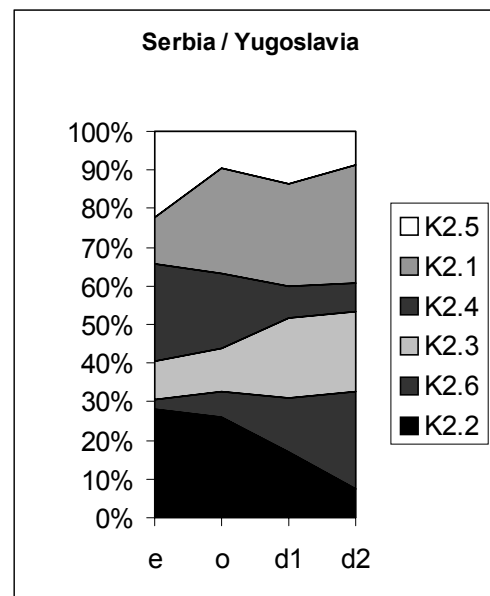


Figure 4: Class size as a function of the various text versions.  
 $\chi^2 = 73.800$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p < 0.001$   
e = escalation oriented ; o = original article ; d1 = moderately de-escalation oriented ; d2 = more strongly de-escalation oriented

1. For a more detailed description of the mental models see Annabring, Dittmann & Kempf (2005).



- A continuation of the old enemy image (K2.2) was found most frequently with subjects who had read an escalation-oriented article; it was least frequent when the article was de-escalation oriented, and its frequency decreased steadily the less escalation oriented the article was (cf. Figure 4).
- An unbiased assessment of (present) Serbian positions (K2.6) was found most frequently with subjects who had read a de-escalation-oriented article; it was least frequent when the article was escalation oriented, and its frequency increased steadily the more de-escalation oriented the article was (cf. Figure 4).

Two other classes are typical of the narratives about Milošević's extradition (E2) (cf. Figure 3): Appreciation of the new start in Serbia (K2.3), which inspired 45.2% of the narratives, and Criticism of the Serbian past (K2.4, 40.2%).

- Appreciation of the new start in Serbia (K2.3) was found most frequently with subjects who had read a de-escalation-oriented article; it was least frequent when the article was escalation oriented, and its frequency increased steadily the more de-escalation oriented the article was (cf. Figure 4).
- Criticism of the Serbian past (K2.4) was found most frequently with subjects who had read an escalation oriented article; it was least frequent when the article was de-escalation oriented, and its frequency decreased steadily the less escalation oriented the article was (cf. Figure 4).

The remaining two classes are typical of the narratives about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (E3) (cf. Figure 3): Appreciation of democratic change in Serbia (K2.1), which inspired 67.9% of these narratives, and refusal to acknowledge democratic change (K2.5, 26.1%).

- Appreciation of democratic change in Serbia (K2.1) was found most frequently with subjects who had read a de-escalation-oriented article; it was least frequent when the article was escalation oriented, and its frequency increased the more de-escalation oriented the article was (cf. Figure 4).
- Refusal to acknowledge democratic change (K2.5) was found most frequently with subjects who had read an escalation-oriented article (cf. Figure 4).

### **The international community**

With respect to the perception of the international community, only three classes of narratives could be identified:

K3.1: Cooperative behavior

K3.2: Confrontational behavior (including some criticism)

K3.3: Identification (including some justification of their behavior)

The behavior of the international community was most frequently interpreted as cooperative (K3.1) in narratives about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (E3) (82.4%) and least frequently interpreted as cooperative in narratives about the conflict in Southern Serbia (E1) (58%) (cf. Figure 5).

- This pattern was found most frequently with subjects who had read a strongly de-escalation oriented article (d2: 80.6%); it was found least frequently if the article was escalation oriented (cf. Figure 6).

The behavior of the international community was most frequently interpreted as confrontational (K3.2) in narratives about Milošević's extradition (E2) (27.8%) and least frequently interpreted as confrontational in narratives about the conflict in Southern Serbia (E1) (cf. Figure 5).

- This pattern was found most frequently with subjects who had read an escalation oriented article (29.8%) (cf. Figure 6).

Identification with the international community (K3.3) was almost exclusively found in narratives about the conflict in southern Serbia (E1), where it was characteristic of 33.7% of the narratives (cf. Figure 5) and was the only violent conflict in our sample of events: violence encourages an audience to identify with its own leadership.

- This pattern was found most frequently with subjects who had read the moderately de-escalation oriented text version (d1), which – more than the other texts – discussed the possible risks of sending KFOR troops to Southern Serbia.

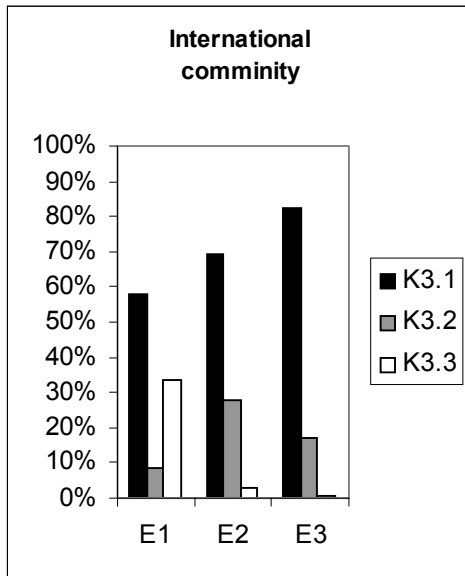


Figure 5: Class size as a function of the reported events.  
 $\chi^2 = 89.964$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < 0.001$   
E1 = Conflict in Southern Serbia; E2 = Extradition of Milošević;  
E3 = Treaty between Serbia and Montenegro

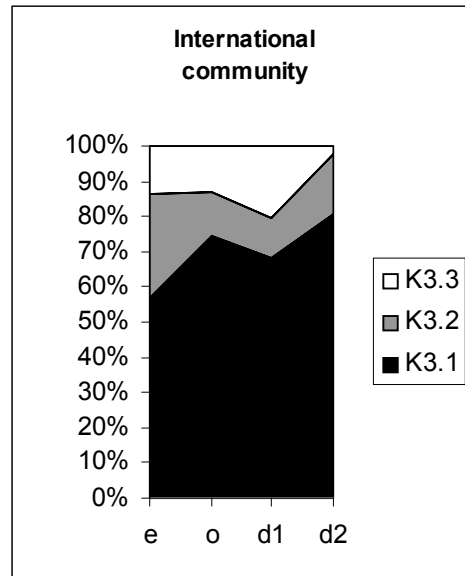


Figure 6: Class size as a function of the various text versions.  
 $\chi^2 = 28.622$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < 0.001$   
e = escalation oriented ; o = original article ; d1 = moderately de-escalation oriented ; d2 = more strongly de-escalation oriented

### Albanian minority in Serbia

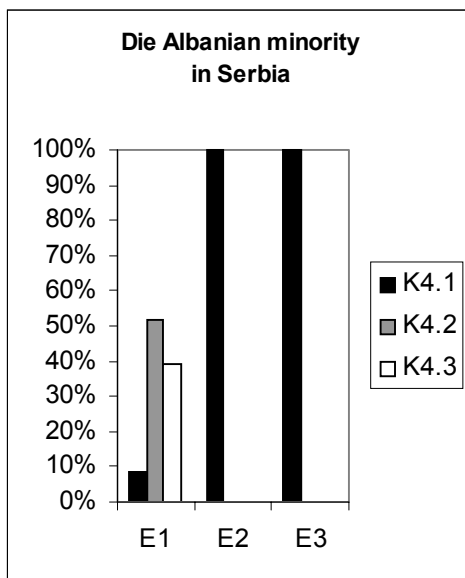


Figure 7: Class size as a function of the reported events.  
 $\chi^2 = 334.760$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < 0.001$   
E1 = Conflict in Southern Serbia; E2 = Extradition of Milošević;  
E3 = Treaty between Serbia and Montenegro

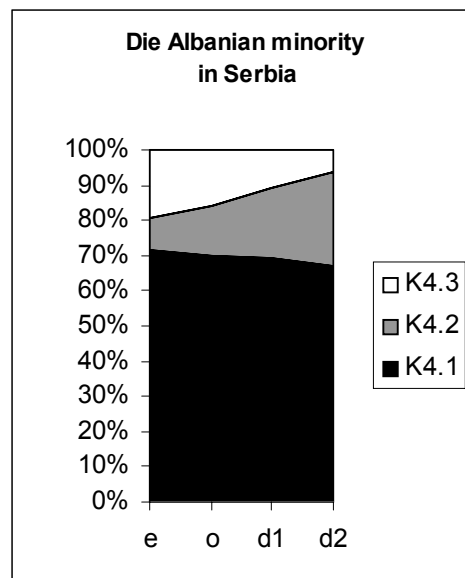


Figure 8: Class size as a function of the various text versions.  
 $\chi^2 = 16.664$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < 0.025$   
e = escalation oriented ; o = original article ; d1 = moderately de-escalation oriented ; d2 = more strongly de-escalation oriented

With respect to the perception of the Albanian minority in Serbia, only two classes made a difference:

K4.2: Critical distance

K4.3: Uncritical identification

A third class of narratives (K4.1) simply didn't mention the Albanians. As could be expected, this class was found mainly in narratives about Milošević's extradition (E2) and about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (E3), where the Albanians played no role. Nonetheless, it was also found in 8.7% of the narratives about the conflict in Southern Serbia (E1), in which the Albanians received little attention (cf. Figure 7).

- Critical distance from the Albanian minority (K4.2) was maintained most frequently by subjects who had read a de-escalation oriented article; it was maintained least frequently when the article was escalation oriented, and its frequency increased steadily the more de-escalation oriented the article was (cf. Figure 8).
- Uncritical identification with the Albanian minority (K4.3), on the other hand, was found most frequently with subjects who had read an escalation oriented article; it was found least frequently when the article was de-escalation oriented, and its frequency increased steadily the more escalation oriented the article was (cf. Figure 8).

### Montenegro

With respect to the perception of Montenegro, again only two classes made a difference.

K5.2: Unbiased acknowledgement of cooperative behavior

K5.3: Escalation oriented partiality

Again, a third class of narratives (K5.1) simply didn't mention the Montenegrin party. As could be expected, this class was mainly found in narratives about the conflict in Southern Serbia (E1) and about Milošević's extradition (E2). Nonetheless, it was also found in 12.6% of the narratives about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (E3), which paid little attention to the Montenegrin side (cf. Figure 9).

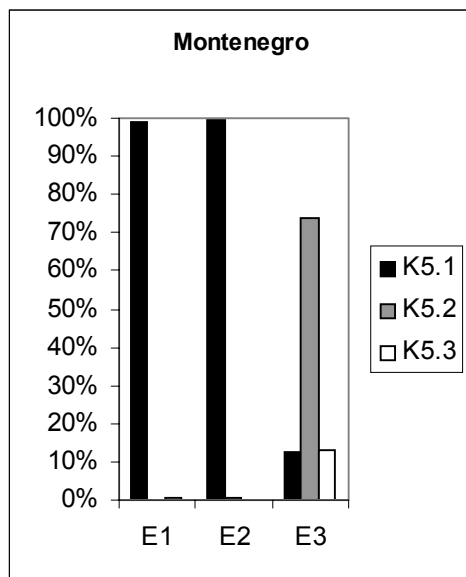


Figure 9: Class size as a function of the reported events.  
 $\chi^2 = 307.450$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < 0.001$   
E1 = Conflict in Southern Serbia; E2 = Extradition of Milošević;  
E3 = Treaty between Serbia and Montenegro

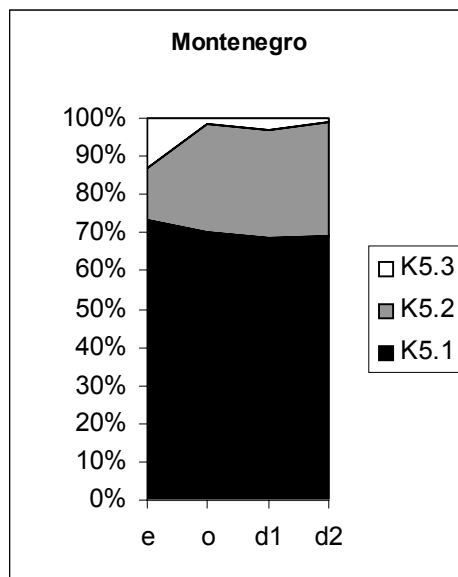


Figure 10: Class size as a function of the various text versions.  
 $\chi^2 = 26.999$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < 0.001$   
e = escalation oriented ; o = original article ; d1 = moderately de-escalation oriented ; d2 = more strongly de-escalation oriented

- While the vast majority (74%) of the narratives about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro acknowledge cooperative Montenegrin behavior (K5.2), this pattern was found less frequently with subjects who had read the escalation oriented article.
- Escalation oriented partiality (K5.3) for the Montenegrin party, on the other hand, was found almost exclusively when the article was escalation oriented.

### 3.5 Conclusions

The present experiment can be qualified as dealing with post-war coverage in the quality press of an outside country which had intervened in the conflict with both diplomatic and military means, whose population was not directly affected by the

war, however, and whose media had not completely sided with any of the war parties. Given these limitations, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Escalation vs. de-escalation oriented framing of news articles does have an effect on the mental models with which the audience interprets the reported events and thus may have an impact on their openness for constructive conflict transformation.
2. Beliefs about news values and audience preferences need to be reconsidered: (a) Escalation oriented news coverage is not the only kind capable of arousing audience interest, de-escalation oriented coverage can also stimulate audience interest. (b) Personalized news is not the only type that audiences like, but rather structural themes can also arouse audience interest.
3. In order not to provoke a boomerang effect, however, peace journalism should be very careful about its strategy: (a) De-escalation oriented coverage has a better chance of achieving a positive response if it is moderate and mainly aims to take the edge off the escalation-oriented frames of interpretation offered by the mainstream press, while it may provoke doubts and thus reduce the chance of positive responses if it interprets the situation within a more radically reversed framework. (b) Danger of victimization is an argument which can potentially influence an audience to identify with its own group and leadership, rather than to be open to constructive conflict transformation.

#### 4. The second experiment

To test whether these results can also be replicated with the text genre and the audience of the provincial press was the aim of a follow-up study by Jennifer Sparr (2004) which measured the acceptance of various text versions with the same instrument used in the original experiment, but did not investigate their effects on the audience's mental models.

##### 4.1 Goals and conditions

The aim of the experiment was to test hypotheses 4.2 and 5.1, according to which the conditions were less favorable than those of the original study:

*Ad 4.2:* The texts were much shorter, and the text format corresponded to that of an Austrian regional paper; and

*Ad 5.1:* the sample of subjects was drawn from its readership.

With respect to hypotheses 1.1, 4.1, 2.2 and 1.2, the conditions were much the same as in the prior study:

*Ad 1.1:* The text material also dealt with post-war conflicts in former Yugoslavia after the fall of Milošević;

*Ad 4.1:* the text genre was again that of news articles and/or short commentaries;

*Ad 2.2:* Austrian diplomacy had also supported Slovenia's, Croatia's and Bosnia's struggle for independence even before the war broke out, and

*Ad 1.2:* Austrian public discourse had been much the same as that in Germany.

With respect to hypothesis 2.1, the conditions were slightly different:

*Ad 2.1:* the Austrian military was not involved in the Kosovo War.

##### 4.2 Experimental design

	Event	Title	Source
<b>E1</b>	Conflict in Southern Serbia	Presovo-Tal neues Pulverfaß am Balkan (Presovo Valley new powder keg in the Balkans)	<i>Vorarlberger Nachrichten</i> , 12-27-2000
<b>E2</b>	Extradition of Milošević to The Hague	Milošević an UNO ausgeliefert (Milošević extradited to the UN)	<i>Vorarlberger Nachrichten</i> , 6-29-2001
<b>E4</b>	Kostunica's reaction to Rugova's victory in the elections in Kosovo	Kostunica bietet Rugova Gespräche an (Kostunica offers dialogue to Rugova)	<i>Vorarlberger Nachrichten</i> , 11-2-2000

Table 2: The original articles used in the study

The design of the experiment resembled that of the original study, but with some modifications: (1) The original articles (o) were taken from an Austrian regional paper, *Vorarlberger Nachrichten*, which is read by more than 70% of the population in Vorarlberg, a province of Austria bordering on Switzerland. (2) The texts were much shorter (about half the length

used in the original study). (3) The treaty between Serbia and Montenegro, for which no suitable article could be found in *Vorarlberger Nachrichten*, was replaced by another event: E4: Kostunica's reaction to Rugova's victory in the Kosovo elections (November, 2000) (cf. Table 2). (4) Since the text format was not suited for a strongly de-escalation oriented framing of the events (d2), this variant was replaced by an escalation-oriented one with reversed partiality: in favor of Serbia (r). (5) The sample of subjects (n = 126) was not representative, but was instead biased towards younger and more highly educated subjects; and (6) the combination of text versions was less systematic than in the original study.

### 4.3 Instruments

Acceptance of the articles was assessed by means of the same questionnaire used in the original study, to which an additional question was added, asking the subjects whether they would decide to read the article if its title appeared as a headline on the front page of their paper (I17).

### 4.4 Results

Consistent with hypotheses 4.2 and 5.1, the subjects' responses to the articles were less differentiated than in the original study. Latent Class Analysis of the questionnaire data identified only five evaluation patterns (K6.1 – K6.5), two of which (K6.4: 13.3% and K6.5: 6.5%) are characterized by missing data, particularly about questions referring to the entertainment value of the articles and also other items. The remaining patterns (K6.1 – K6.3), can again be ordered according to the interest in further information which the articles aroused as:

- some interest in further information (K6.1),
- little interest in further information (K6.2) and
- no interest in further information (K6.3).<sup>1</sup>

They are characterized by a generally lower degree of interest aroused and a generally less positive evaluation of the articles than found by the original study, and there is no significant correlation between the evaluation patterns and the text-versions which the subjects evaluated (cf. Figure 12).

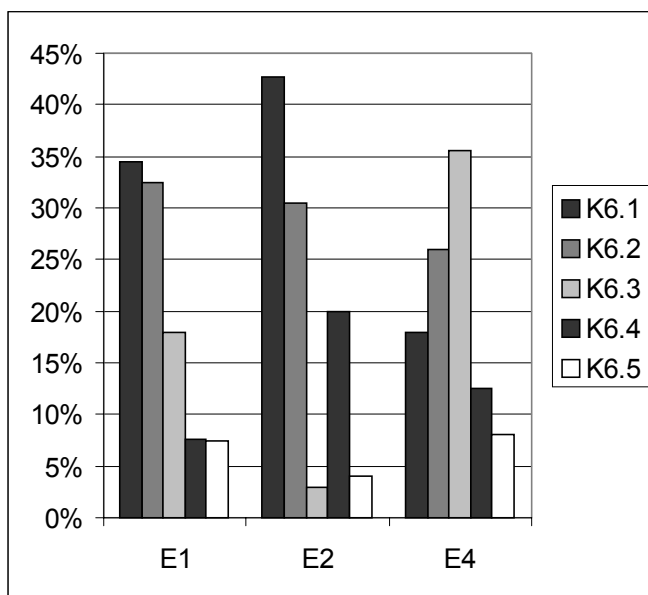


Figure 11: Frequency of the evaluation patterns as a function of the various text versions.  $\chi^2=56.46$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p<0.001$   
E1 = Conflict in Southern Serbia; E2 = Extradition of Milošević;  
E4 = Kostunica's offer of dialogue

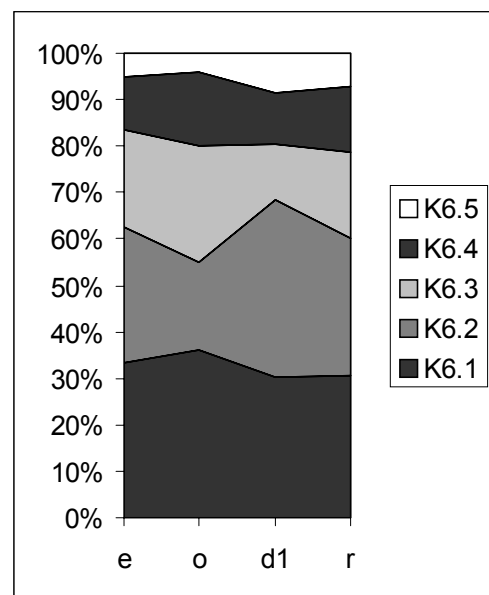


Figure 12: Frequency of the evaluation patterns as a function of the reported events.  $\chi^2=16.18$ ,  $df=12$ , n.s.  
e = escalation oriented ; o = original article; d1 = moderately de-escalation oriented ; r = escalation oriented with reversed partiality

If any tendency can be found in the data at all, then it would seem that the evaluations of the original articles varied most widely (high proportion of K6.1 and K6.3), and the evaluations of the de-escalation oriented text versions varied least of all (high proportion of K6.2).

1. For a more detailed description of the evaluation patterns see Sparr (2004).

*Some interest in further information:* Evaluation pattern K6.1 resembles pattern K1.3 of the original study, though on a lower level. As compared with K1.3, the reported events seem to be more familiar (I5) than in K1.3 and fewer new aspects seem to be brought up (I10). The articles seem less interesting (I2), less sensational (I3) and less informative (I4) and provoke more doubts about their factual accuracy (I6) and truthfulness.

*Little interest in further information* (K6.2) goes hand in hand with an average or undecided evaluation of the article with respect to the other items on the questionnaire.

*No interest in further information* (K6.3) is combined with a negative evaluation of the articles throughout. They seem difficult to understand (I9) and rather hard to read (I13), as rather boring (I1) and not interesting (I2), and they do not bring up new aspects (I10).

- In accordance with beliefs about the news value of personal and negative issues ("bad news is good news"), evaluation pattern K6.1 (some interest in further information) applies most frequently to reports about Milošević's extradition (E2) and the conflict in Southern Serbia (E1). Kostunica's offer of dialogue to Rugova (E4) is less dramatic and arouses less audience interest.
- Vice versa, evaluation pattern K6.3 (no interest in further information) applies most frequently to reports about Kostunica's offer of talks (E4). In evaluations of reports about Milošević's extradition (E2) it was almost completely absent (cf. Figure 11).

#### 4.5 Conclusions

The second experiment can be qualified as focusing on post-war coverage in the provincial press of an outside country which had intervened in the conflict with diplomatic, but not with military means, whose population was not directly affected by the war either, and whose media had not completely sided with any of the war parties. Given these limitations, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Although the provincial audience seems to accept everything reported by its media, and even the escalation oriented texts with reversed partiality (r) were accepted no less than the other text versions, peace journalism has less chance to influence the readership of the provincial press.
2. As it seems, the text format of a regional paper is too constrained, and its audience is too little interested or feels too little involved in international affairs, and traditional news factors have too much impact on its reading preferences.

#### 5. Discussion

Summarizing the results of the two experiments, they speak in favor of the peace journalism project.

Hypothesis 5.2 can clearly be rejected. Escalation oriented coverage is *not* more suitable to the purpose of arousing audience interest, but rather de-escalation oriented coverage has the same potential:

- De-escalation oriented articles were never accepted to a lesser degree than the other text versions, neither in the first nor in the second experiment.
- In the first experiment, which focused on the quality press and its audience, lack of interest in further information (K1.4 + K1.6) was found most frequently in reaction to the original articles (o) and could be reduced to the same degree by the other text versions, irrespectively of their escalation or de-escalation oriented framing.
- The more strongly de-escalation oriented test-versions (d2) evoked the same amount of strong interest in further information (K1.3) as the escalation oriented ones (e), and
- lack of interest, in combination with a negative evaluation of the articles (K1.6), decreased steadily the less escalation oriented and the more de-escalation oriented the articles were.

In accordance with hypotheses 4.2 and 5.1, the responses to the various text versions were less pronounced in the second experiment, which was based on the provincial press and its audience.

- Interest in further information was generally lower in the audience of the provincial paper, and
- differences in the various text versions had no effect on the acceptance of the articles. Even the escalation oriented text versions with reversed partiality (r) were as acceptable as the other ones.

Moreover, the first experiment also confirmed hypotheses 3.1 and 3.2, according to which acceptance of de-escalation oriented text versions should be greater if they refrain from interpreting situations within a too radically reversed framework.

- The greatest doubts about the impartiality and accuracy of the articles (K1.3) was aroused by reports about violent conflicts in Southern Serbia (E1) which did not agree with previously accepted enemy images, and
- the moderately de-escalation oriented text versions (d1) aroused less doubt (K1.3) than the more strongly escalation oriented ones (d2).

- Nonetheless, the de-escalation oriented framing of the latter ones (d2) was still moderate enough not to provoke more doubts (K1.3) than the original articles (o) or the escalation oriented ones (e).

Last but not least, the results of the two experiments also support the assumption that traditional news factors like "negative vs. positive" and "personal vs. structural" do have an impact on audience responses to news articles.

- In the first experiment, *lack of interest* in further information (K1.4 + K1.6) was the most frequent response to articles about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (E3: positive/structural) and the least frequent response to articles about the conflict in Southern Serbia (E1: negative/personal).
- In the second experiment, *lack of interest* in further information (K6.3) was strongest with regard to Kostunica's offer of dialogue (E4: positive/personal) and weakest with regard to the Milošević's extradition (E2: negative/personal), where it was almost completely absent.

The impact of these news factors is not homogenous, however, and depends on the complexity of the articles.

- The articles about the treaty between Serbia and Montenegro (E3: positive/structural) were not only those that most often met with a *lack of interest* (K1.4+K1.6), they were also those that most frequently aroused *strong interest* in further information (K1.3); and
- strong interest in further information (K1.3) was particularly aroused by the more strongly de-escalation oriented text versions (d2), which gave a more complex depiction of the reported conflicts.

Obviously, simplification has no news value of its own, but on the contrary: more complex reporting can attract audience interest even for issues which are not inherently very interesting.

All in all, these results are consistent with findings by Wolling (2002), according to whom the quality of information is a crucial factor in the evaluation of news programs. The capability of the media to attract attention with quality reports seems to be constrained by the text genre and the media format, however. Moreover, the audience's political knowledge may also have an impact. As Eilders (1997) has found, the more political knowledge readers have, the less they will be influenced by traditional news factors. The better they are informed, the more they will have their own ideas about which aspects of an issue are relevant to them.

Consistent with audience surveys which found that the readership of daily newspapers would like to read political news coverage which gives more background information, is more critical and less influenced by established institutions (Weber, 2003), it is particularly the news factors of "simplicity vs. complexity," "negative vs. positive" and "personal vs. structural" that seem to lose their impact if the text genre and the media format offer enough space for more complexity, more balanced reporting and also the coverage of structural issues.

In the quality press, these preconditions seem to be fulfilled to a sufficient degree, both in order to interest the audience in de-escalation oriented post-war coverage and in order to influence the way it interprets reported events.

As shown by the first experiment, an escalation vs. de-escalation oriented framing of the reported events has a clear impact on the mental models with which an audience interprets conflict.

Escalation oriented coverage promoted mental models which focus on the evil past of the Milošević era (K2.4), perpetuate the anti-Serbian enemy image (K2.2) and refuse to acknowledge democratic change in Serbia (K2.5); which interpret the behavior of the international community as confrontational (K3.2), identify with the Albanian minority in Serbia (K4.3) and side with Montenegro (K5.3) against the Serbs.

De-escalation oriented coverage, on the other hand, promoted mental models which appreciate the new start (K2.3) and democratic change (K2.1) in Serbia and evaluate (present) Serbian behavior and positions in an unbiased way (K2.6), which interpret the behavior of the international community as cooperative (K3.1), maintain a critical distance from the Albanian minority in Serbia (K4.2) and acknowledge Montenegro's cooperative behavior in an unbiased way (K5.2).

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