

# Trivial Stories and Fancy Pictures?

## *Tabloidization Tendencies in Finnish and Swedish Regional and National Newspapers 1982–1997*

GÖRAN DJUPSUND & TOM CARLSON

In recent years media researchers have noticed how commercial or market oriented news-logic is affecting the standard of television news, at a time of increasing competition (e.g. McManus 1994; Klite et al 1997; in the North e.g. Asp 1995; Helland 1995; Hjarvard 1995; Hvitfelt 1994). This development has been described with concepts like tabloid-TV, tabloidization, and tabloid fever (Klite 1995). When news is sold as an entertainment product, the material is converted into categories of human interest and soft news. Furthermore, visual elements, the drama, tempo and rhythm of reporting news has become more emphasised.

Among others, Neil Postman has argued that television and its format has become the paradigm for the overall conception of public information. Consequently, the total information environment begins to mirror television (Postman 1986, 111; cf. Altheide and Snow 1992). Thus, concerning the daily press, which is our topic of interest, McManus (1994, 7) writes that...

[...] newspapers are now moving 'to embrace such topics as parenting or hobbies or shopping, and a willingness to billboard such subjects on the front page – often at the expense of government news' [...] A more obvious change in print has been the trend toward more vivid and graphic presentation [...] [N]ewspapers across the country have become more visually oriented [...] '[M]any editors appear to have been convinced ... that more and bigger photographs [...] were necessary counters to the visual and entertainment elements of TV'.

In this study, we focus on Nordic daily newspapers. The purpose is to monitor eventual tabloidization

tendencies over time. Before we determine the material and method, we will briefly introduce some normative starting points, as well as specify our conception of tabloidization on a theoretical level.

### **Normative Starting Points**

The study has a normative point of departure. Thus, we define democracy as follows: democracy in a society will be fulfilled to the extent that the citizens influentially participate in public decision-making (Ståhlberg and Helander 1972). With the term public decision-making, we do not exclusively mean decisions by elected representatives. We also embrace other decisions that clearly influence the life of large citizen groups, e.g. labour market agreements. The conditions for this definition are, on the one hand, a social participation, and on the other, that this participation is influential. Both the social participation, and especially the degree of influence at the same time, depends on certain other conditions. The most overwhelming premise can be described as knowledge. This knowledge consists of three fields. Firstly, knowledge of which questions are, or will be, on the political agenda. Secondly, content-related knowledge of these questions and alternative views and solutions concerning the questions. Thirdly, knowledge of how different groups within the society see these questions. Equipped with this kind of knowledge, the citizen has the ability to form his/her own opinion of which solutions to support. Furthermore, the citizen can draw guidelines for his/her own strategic actions.<sup>1</sup>

From which sources should the citizen obtain this knowledge? Normatively, we argue that one of

the most essential functions of the mass media is to offer citizens knowledge and information of the above-mentioned variety. This view can be specified in two points.

Firstly, we agree theoretically, that an individual medium neither can nor should fulfil its consumers' need of knowledge totally. Of course, this need should be fulfilled by the total media supply that the consumer uses. However, some relatively new trends related to media consumption should be noticed in this connection. Even if newspaper reading in the Nordic countries continuously lies on a relatively high level, there are tendencies towards a decrease on this point. For example, the willingness of households to subscribe to daily newspapers is decreasing in many population segments. Slightly simplified, it could be suggested that, whereas citizens used to subscribe to several newspapers, today they are becoming more dependent on only one newspaper source. At the same time, the use of the media is swinging more and more to the advantage of radio and television. According to our opinion, this indicates that the demand for relevant information is moving towards the individual medium.

Secondly, we presume that the media have three slightly separate roles. In line with the definition of societal decision-making given earlier, these roles are; to arouse interest for what is happening in the society; to show which questions are topical or under debate; and to give information about these issues and ways in which they can be handled. Every medium operates with all these fields, but the balance is achieved in different ways in different media. On the one hand, we are dealing with the differences between the radio and television and newspapers. On the other hand, the circulation – national versus regional or local – has significance in this connection. Especially television is largely characterised by the rather low limits for the amount of information it provides. At the same time, television and radio have the advantage of being able to work with several communicative elements. Thus, these media meet their consumers on more levels than newspapers.

To sum up, media should: arouse interest; present topical and upcoming issues; inform about the standpoints of different groups of actors. In this regard, it is natural that radio and television work more with these first two sections, but they do not completely neglect the third. The press has traditionally focused more towards the third section. Generally, we maintain that a certain difference of focus between the media is acceptable. However,

the essential result of the discussion above is that the press has a special responsibility concerning the fulfilment of citizens' needs for social and political information. Against this background, the aim of this study is to examine what kind of information the press actually presents to the public. From a reader's perspective, we pose the following question: "Have the opportunities to obtain social information changed during the past years for newspaper readers; and if so, how?" In this respect, special attention is paid to the various tendencies which were criticised in the introduction, and which here are united under the concept of tabloidization.

### **Tabloidization**

Tabloidization includes aspects concerning both content and format. Regarding content, our interest is limited to a phenomenon that we call trivialization (cf. Asp 1995, 17-25). This has to do with an orientation towards "soft news", "human interest", "infotainment"; and away from "hard news" concerning politics, economy and social processes. News of sport, dramatic events like crimes and accidents, entertainment, culture, lifestyle, everyday life, celebrities, weather, sensations and so on, get increased space.

Regarding format, our interest is limited to visualization, a phenomenon that gives rise to bigger pictures and other iconic signs, still more colours – more pictures based on the degree of the aesthetic quality; symbol amplitude, topicality and expressiveness. The reasons for visualization are many. One has to do with reader maximisation. At a time of over-supply of information and shortage of receiver attention, visualization becomes an additional technique to catch the attention and interest of the public. Since it is assumed that readers have become conditioned by television to be more visually orientated, a visually appealing newspaper product is needed in the fight for market share (e.g. Rehe 1985, 11). Another reason has to do with the diffusion of an originally American trend in the newspaper world (see Henning 1995). Newspaper publishers have now adopted a new concept of aesthetics and design. Creating a visualized newspaper is a way of presenting layout skills, and a talent for implementing new trends.

These tendencies have a number of consequences. Concerning trivialization, such a development, in the end, erodes the citizens' capability both to obtain relevant knowledge and to participate in public decision-making. Concerning visualiz-

ation, it is possible that such events, which offer “good pictures”, begin to be preferred when news is selected. Thus, the information upon which citizens base their opinions and actions might be distorted. This is especially significant today, when newspaper reading often means a quick glancing of headlines, captions, leads and photographs. Consequently, one can presume that press pictures, in the long run, will affect the knowledge of newspaper readers. Earlier research on information processing supports the belief that the brain processes pictures in a different way than words. Besides the ability to process pictures quicker, people seem to recall them better. Moreover, photographs seem to awaken a greater emotional involvement (see Graber 1988 and 1996).

In Figure 1, visualization and trivialization are combined in order to illustrate four different situations.

We expect observations in quadrant I (low visualization degree, high trivialization degree) to be rare since a material based on “soft news” and “human interest” usually is richly illustrated with pictures. Quadrant II (high trivialization degree, high visualization degree) is the area to find the traditional, commercial tabloid- and evening press. Quadrant III (low trivialization degree, low visualization degree) is typical for some extreme newspapers of the German press tradition (e.g. *Zürcher Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*) but also of a continental tradition (*Le Monde*, *Figaro* etc.) From a purely theoretical point of view, this kind of press would be ideal. However, it is doubtful whether

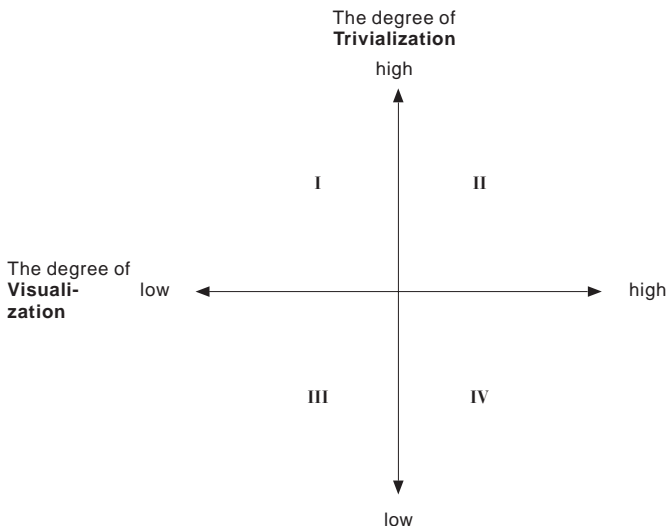
such a category would be able to attract ordinary people or whether it would please only a highly educated elite. Quadrant IV (low trivialization degree, high visualization degree) is in that case to be preferred, i.e. socially oriented news presented in a visually appealing form that is able to convey interest, thus reaching larger groups of citizens.

### Empirical Data

Admittedly, our discussion of tabloidization has been rather general. Empirically, we approach the development of newspaper reality in a more restricted way. The crucial question is how to examine, in a restricted but still fruitful way, tabloidization tendencies in the press. Which newspapers should be analysed and what should be examined? When choosing newspapers, attention must be paid to their character. Thus, it is important to notice where a newspaper is published (cultural context). Moreover, one should pay attention to distribution ambitions and circulation (national, regional, local). Another consideration concerns whether we are dealing with a daily or evening newspaper.

Firstly, we restrict our research to daily newspapers. Secondly, we will observe both national and regional newspapers. Finally, we take into account the cultural context where the newspapers are published. Thus, we decided to observe newspapers published both in Finland and in Sweden. From national newspapers, we chose the Swedish *Dagens Nyheter* (DN), and the Finnish *Hufvudstadsbladet* (Hbl). The *Swedish Västerbottens-*

Figure 1. *The Relationship between Visualization and Trivialization*



*Kuriren* (V-K), and the Finnish *Vasabladet* (Vbl) represent the regional press. This design allows comparisons to be made both between countries and between the national and regional levels.

The research covers two periods: one week (21-27th April) in 1982 and 1997 respectively. Thus, the span seems to be long enough to identify changes in the newspapers, without the factors in the newspapers' environment having changed all too dramatically. Empirically, we chose to examine the front pages. The reasons for this were three: Firstly, to be work economical. Secondly, to take support from earlier research that had similarly restricted analysis to the front page, the part of a newspaper that has undergone the toughest scrutiny from a journalistic point of view (see Hvitfelt 1985; cf. Ekecrantz and Olsson 1994, 102; McManus 1994, 218). Thirdly, it is our conviction that the front page today – at a time of a superficially glancing, television-oriented readership – has become an even more important part of a newspaper than previously.

Regarding the trivialization aspect, the following will be examined: We will observe the area (cm<sup>2</sup>) and the share (%) of different types of articles. The articles are divided into three categories; “hard news”, “soft news” and “news of crimes and accidents” (cf. Asp 1995; SOU 1975). This analysis will embrace both textual and visual elements.

The visualization aspect will be analysed in a number of ways. Firstly, we will observe the share of pictures on the front page. Secondly, we measure the extent in which articles are illustrated. Finally, we will analyse the “main picture” – that is the largest photograph on the front page – in more detail. One reason for focusing attention on the main picture is that it is theoretically possible to see the main picture's shape and placement on the front page as a kind of reflection of how the newspaper wishes to meet its readership (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 206).

## Findings

### *What do the Newspapers Write about?*

The degree and the art of trivialization in news is selfevidently a complex phenomenon. In this study, however, we will choose a simplified approach and focus only on the topic that the news is handling; “hard news”, “soft news”, and “crimes and accidents”. McManus (1994, 219) has argued that the share of serious socially oriented news in an ideal case must be at least 70% of the newspaper as a

whole. However, since our interest mainly concerns developmental tendencies, we will not present an ideal model with given restrictions for shares of different news categories. Our normative conviction is, nevertheless, that “hard news” should dominate the front page.

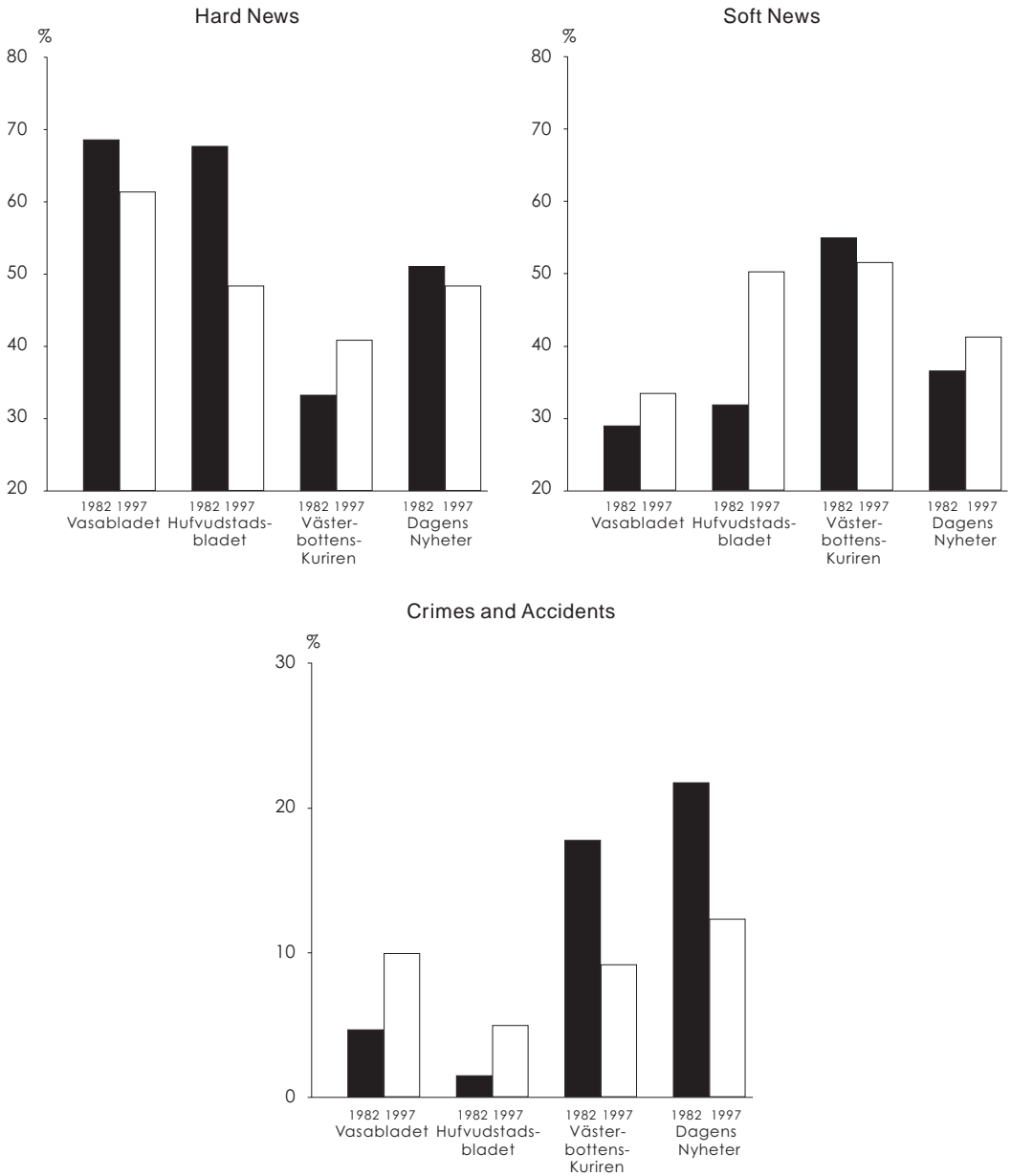
The news mix in the examined newspapers is presented in the form of bar graphs. Before we present our results, we wish to point out that our research material is relatively small. Furthermore, the results are presented mainly in the form of means. Thus, one or two clearly deviating pages can mislead the mean values of a whole period for a newspaper. To avoid these pitfalls as efficiently as possible, we have kept an eye on the standard deviation. In unclear cases, and when the standard deviation has been high, we have returned to the actual newspapers to control whether there exists an appropriate balance between our reader impression and the summed numerical impression. The result regarding the news mix of the different dailies is presented in Figure 2.

The overwhelming perception is that the news is affected rather by the differences between countries than the differences between national and regional newspapers. Furthermore, it is worth noticing the levels from which the newspapers start out in 1982. At that time, the Swedish newspapers (DN and V-K) showed a higher share of both “soft news” and “crimes and accidents” than did the Finnish newspapers (Hbl and Vbl). Over time, Hbl is the newspaper where the biggest changes have taken place. The paper shows a clear decrease in the share of “hard news” on the front page.

When we look at the situation in 1997, we notice that Vbl is the only newspaper where the “hard news” is allowed to dominate the front page in a way that causes one to remember the earlier mentioned ideals. In the other newspapers, the “soft news” and the reporting of “accidents and crimes” have gained a dominating position.

Concerning illustrations, we notice that “soft news” is the most visualized. However, we can also observe certain minor differences between the newspapers. Vbl and DN, which during the first period had the least visualized “hard news”, show the biggest change on this point. During the later period, these newspapers are even slightly more visual than Hbl and V-K.

To sum up, if we assume that the goal to aim for is a clear priority for “hard news” on the front page, we can state that the Swedish media, already in 1982, were rather much trivialized. Over time, the Finnish media is developing towards the same di-

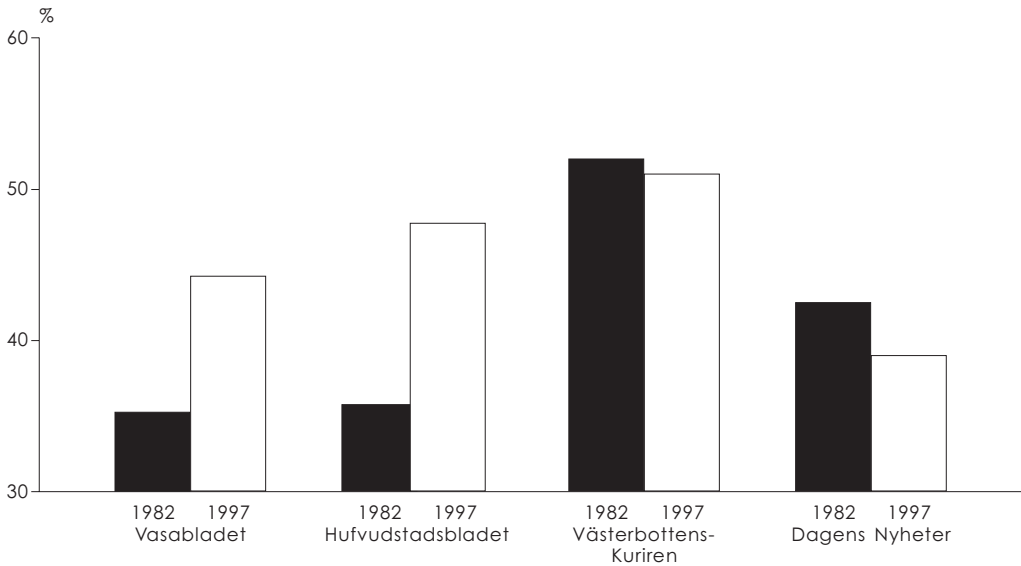
**Figure 2. News Types on the Front Pages (means; %)**

rection. However, Vbl seems to retain a slight and acceptable amount of “hard news” on its front page.

### Visualization of the Front Page

Concerning visualization, the other dimension of tabloidization, we are empirically observing two

aspects. Our questions are: “How visualized is the front page?” and “What are the expressions of the visualization?” Some light can be shed on the first question by looking at the relationship between the textual and visual elements on the front page. The different expressions of visualization can be seen from many viewpoints. Here we have chosen to focus on the amount of pictures. Furthermore, we

**Figure 3.** *The Share of Visual Elements on the Front Page (means; %)*

have undertaken a qualitative analysis of the main picture. The share of visual elements on the front page is presented in Figure 3.

The front page of today seems to be highly visualized. On average, nearly half of the front page contains pictures. Furthermore, we notice that the differences in development are mostly to be seen between the two countries, rather than inside each of them. The Swedish newspapers were, already during the first period, heavily illustrated. Since that time the textual elements have continued to fight a losing battle. In Finland, the development is slightly different. Hbl and Vbl had, in 1982, a relatively low visualization value, but have since developed strongly. Especially Hbl appears today to be even more visualized than DN. It is also worth mentioning that the number of pictures on the front page varies without a clear pattern, either within or between the newspapers.

Let us now examine the main picture on the front page. How dominating is it? Are there differences between newspapers, and can we notice some changes over time? The position of the main picture has been measured by its absolute size (cm<sup>2</sup>), and its share (%) of the front page. The last measurement indicates how clearly a certain picture has been chosen to be emphasised. Figure 4 clearly shows that the main picture has been worth choosing as a subject for special attention.

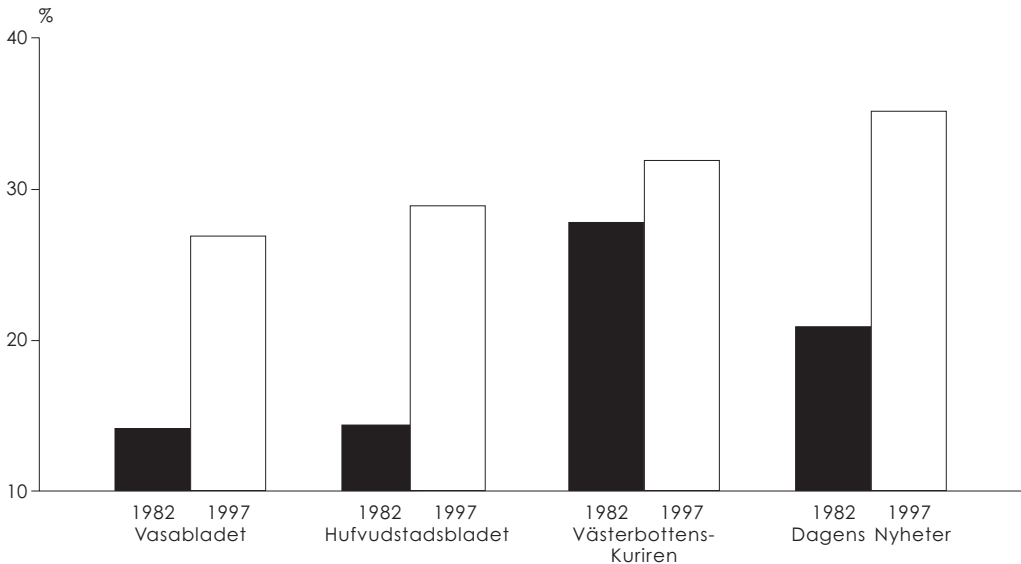
The result illustrates a remarkable strengthening of the main picture's position (cf. Becker 1997,

6). The development is particularly strong regarding the Finnish dailies. In 1982, the main picture differed only marginally from the other pictures, whereas in 1997 the picture often dominated the front page. On average it covered about one third of the page.

Certain differences between the countries were also revealed. Again, the development seems to have started earlier in Sweden. Already in 1982, the main pictures on DN's and V-K's front pages were relatively large. In spite of this, they are still becoming larger as time goes on. To sum up, the front pages of the daily papers today are strongly visualized and this, in a way that strongly underlines the main picture and its position.

### Qualitative Observations

In the following, the main pictures (n=52) will be qualitatively analysed in closer detail. Our interest is, as mentioned earlier, mainly directed towards aspects of form like abundance of connotations, aesthetic qualities, expressiveness etc. As a starting point for the analysis we use Roland Barthes' partition of photographic connotation techniques: 1) use of trick effects; 2) posing of people; 3) posing of objects; 4) photogenia, in other words, taking advantage of lighting, camera angles, exposure and developing techniques; 5) aestheticism, in other words, a purpose to raise the photography to an art standard; 6) syntax; in other words, utilising a se-

**Figure 4.** *The Share of the Main Picture on the Front Page (means; %)*

ries of pictures (Barthes 1986, 21-25). The unit of analysis is the main picture. The description below covers each newspaper separately.

#### *Vasabladet 1982*

- (1) A black and white (in the following: b/w) picture of a man outside, showing a horse.
- (2) A b/w picture of two roadworkers in a village, repairing a hole in a road with spades and tarmac.
- (3) A b/w picture from an "afternoon home" for school children: on a couch, a woman is reading fairy tales for five children.
- (4) A b/w picture of three young men standing at the charred ruins of a burned-down village shop.
- (5) A b/w snapshot from an ice hockey match. A goalkeeper lies on the ice; two players are struggling for the puck.
- (6) A b/w picture of preparations at a theatre: an actress is trying on a fur coat.

#### *Vasabladet 1997*

- (1) A colour picture which portrays a man on his plot of land. In the background stands a newly built indoor sports hall.
- (2) A colour picture: a man standing on a road besides a fence gate. In the background lies a forest area (which is planned to become a car park for an indoor ice-skating rink).
- (3) A colour picture taken inside a prison cell: two male prison officers are standing at the cell door.
- (4) A colour picture from a pub; three men try, half-lying and laughing, a stage built for the world championships in ice hockey to be televised. Posing and utilisation of a camera angle from below are used.

(5) A colour picture of ice fishing (jigging). Two jiggers are cleaning fishes on the ice. Strong, clear colours.

(6) A colour picture of Bishop Desmond Tutu sitting on a chair in his office in Cape Town.

In summary, there are no clear patterns regarding themes, neither within nor between the points of time. Certain pictures that arouse attention and interest can, however, be observed. Thus, in the pictures of 1982, children and animals (a horse) are depicted. Among the photographs from 1997, the picture from the pub, with its hilarious atmosphere, and the one from the unknown prison environment can be labelled as attention grabbing and interest arousing. Bishop Tutu is the only portrayed person representing a social elite. Pictures related to sport occur sparingly in both points of time. Concerning format, the changeover to colour pictures is worth noticing. In other respects, the aim to create distinguished pictures is not eye-catching. Posing, with an altered camera angle, is used only in the pub photography.

#### *Hufvudstadsbladet 1982*

- (1) A b/w picture from a hot-tempered demonstration; police officers try to move environmental activists who are offering passive resistance.
- (2) A b/w snapshot from an ice hockey match. One player is powerfully tackling another.
- (3) A b/w picture of Israeli soldiers on a ladder about to evict Jewish settlers from a roof in Sinai.

- (4) A b/w picture from the archipelago: a man in a boat is transporting a tractor. In the background stands a boat-house.
- (5) A b/w snapshot from an ice hockey match: four players in front of the goal; the puck is going into the goal behind the goalkeeper.
- (6) A b/w picture from an ice hockey match; again a situation in front of the goal; several players are struggling for the puck.
- (7) A b/w picture of Argentinean soldiers parading on a street lined with people.

### *Hufvudstadsbladet 1997*

- (1) A b/w picture from a football match; struggle for a ball; one player in the air is heading the ball; an opponent is waiting behind.
- (2) A colour picture from a residential suburb: a girl dressed in red and black is waiting at a bus shelter. Grey concrete can be seen in the background. The wall of the bus shelter is decorated with a black and white advertising poster of Russian female soldiers on parade. The photograph includes aesthetic ambitions (the contrast between grey and red; the advertising photograph within the picture).
- (3) A colour picture with a sport motive: four men are training in a rowing pool. The picture has a beautiful composition: the oars are lathering the water in the bottom right corner; the edge of the pool and lines of the oars are running over the photograph.
- (4) A b/w picture: a book stall on an esplanade; people are passing by. In focus, a woman is standing with a book in her hand. The picture is taken or cropped so that the subject matter slopes strongly down to the right edge of the picture.
- (5) A colour picture of a demonstration against building a power line: four children with a demonstration sign; an adult in the background. The motive is again diagonally sloping.
- (6) A b/w picture: two men are standing with a nature conservation diploma in their hands, on stones, in the middle of a sea. Half the space of the picture is taken up by the sky with light clouds. Clear character posing; the persons have been transported to the stones just for taking the picture.
- (7) A b/w snapshot from an ice hockey match; two players and a goalkeeper are struggling in front of the goal.

Traditional media logic can be noticed in the selection of pictures in 1982, more widely than in the material of the year 1997. The 1982 material seeks drama, struggle, and excitement. The sport pictures of 1982, that comprise nearly half of the material, offer a certain meaning to that kind of criteria. The same can be said for the pictures from the eviction and the scattering of the environmental activists. These two pictures and a third, the military parade, are linked to "hard news". Furthermore, in 1997 the occurrence of sport pictures is noticeable. In the demonstration picture of 1997, children have taken the place of environmental activists. Themes from abroad are missing, replaced by local news – the

suburb and the esplanade. Concerning format, an increased consciousness of composition and aesthetics can be observed. The pictures chosen to dominate the front page in 1997 are often those which have a special form (colour matching, sloping angles of camera, posing). The paper has, however, not totally abandoned black and white photographs.

### *Västerbottens-Kuriren 1982*

- (1) A b/w portrait of a smiling Lennart Hyland (a well-known television celebrity) looking at the camera. Clear character posing and wilfully chosen object posing – a raised boxing glove. The caption explains the meaning of the glove: "When Hyland hits it usually leads to success".
- (2) A b/w football picture catching a penalty situation from behind the net: the goalkeeper is "hanging" in the air trying to grab the ball. The situation picture is branded with motion.
- (3) A b/w ice hockey picture: a journalist with a microphone in hand is interviewing two ice hockey players in a locker room.
- (4) A b/w picture of a man and a woman dancing a "hambo" in a national costume in a village. Character posing.
- (5) A b/w picture in a children's kindergarten; three children surrounded by soft rag-dolls which the nursery has got as a present from a high school class. The photographer has utilised object posing (dolls).
- (6) A b/w picture of five "disappointed environmental protestors" standing outside a provincial administration building.

### *Västerbottens-Kuriren 1997*

- (1) A colour picture from a football match. The players are struggling for a ball; one is lying on the grass.
- (2) A colour picture: a contesting yachtsman in a pleasureboat in water, behind the ice flows (= early training). An intertextual caption: "The yachtsman's sense of snow".
- (3) A colour picture: an older man is standing in snow on his land watching an earth embankment. Headline: "Nervously waiting for the spring flood".
- (4) A colour picture: the ousted chairman of a provincial tourism committee walking, head down, across the floor of a court room. The background is, through the photographer's choice, inaccurate in a way that creates the impression of movement.
- (5) A colour picture taken at the inauguration ceremony of a new business centre. Actress Maud Adams is looking and smiling at the camera. In the background are people, among them journalists. The photographer has used a camera filter which makes the shine of floodlights in the background appear starlike. The edges of the picture are black toned.
- (6) A colour picture: a group of schoolchildren are standing at a wall. A car is passing by in the foreground. Movement in the picture is created with exposure; by picturing the car inaccurately, high speed is indicated.

In the material, both of 1982 and 1997, some well known and interest catching media celebrities ap-



pear (Hyland and Adams respectively). Correspondingly, two sport themes appear. Furthermore, interest and emotion arousing children are pictured both in 1982 (soft environment: rag-dolls) and 1997 (hard environment: traffic lane). Only one picture per each period can be mentioned as relating to serious socially oriented news: the disappointed environmental protesters (1982) and the bitter, ousted chairman of a provincial tourism committee (1997). The last mentioned is the only person in the picture material who represents an elite (local). Concerning form related aspects, also here a tendency appears towards increased usage of photogenic techniques: creating movement into the motive; the starlike picturing of floodlights in the picture of Maud Adams, and black toning of the edges. Moreover, the newspaper has totally changed black and white pictures to colour pictures.

### *Dagens Nyheter 1982*

- (1) A b/w picture: firemen standing by a burnt house. A valuable archive had been stored in the house: some of the archive papers have been rescued and are lying charred on the lawn.
- (2) A b/w football picture: the players are running a "lap of honour", right arms with clenched fists lifted as a sign of victory.
- (3) A b/w picture from a press conference. Minister Fällidin is speaking in the foreground, with an arm lifted in the air. Minister Ullsten in the background is looking elsewhere.
- (4) A b/w picture of a long demonstration march. Employees of a factory are marching with signs. In the foreground stands a woman with a screaming, open mouth. Her sign is dominating the picture.
- (5) A b/w football picture: two players fighting for the ball. Intensive expressions on the faces.
- (6) A dramatic b/w picture. On a street, police officers are overpowering a male driver who had been "joyriding".
- (7) A b/w picture from a "ghost town" in South Georgia. Old wooden houses and high snow covered mountains in the background. One man can be seen faraway in the middle of the scene.

### *Dagens Nyheter 1997*

- (1) A colour picture from a swimming pool. The face of a female swimming competitor – with open, panting mouth – appears from the turquoise water. She is looking upward and resting on one of the red ropes, which border the racecourse. Through the chosen depth of field, the background of the picture is blurred. The intensive face together with the red and turquoise colours gives a beautiful, aesthetic and photogenically generated picture.
- (2) A colour picture: The face of an immigrant and an upper body are to be seen in the low left edge. The rest of the picture is showing a street scene with people wandering about. The environment is, through the chosen depth of field, unclear (which gives an impression of "an anonymous mass").

- (3) A painted colour illustration of watercolour type. The face of an immigrant, white with brown contour lines, surrounded by white squares in a moss green background with text like, "black vote", "time for a change", "take up your rights".
- (4) A colour picture: a wildlife protector and a police officer in a hut are inspecting a shot, hanging bear. A man with a child in his arms is to be seen in the doorway.
- (5) A colour picture from a rock concert. A female singer and a guitar player are pictured. Photographic play with sharpening; slope photography or cropping. A beautiful composition of colours.
- (6) A colour picture; portrait of a teenager. A picture of a face; a shadow is falling over the left side of the face. In the right edge, there is a black silhouette of a face. Photogenic impression: shadowing and silhouettes.
- (7) A b/w picture from a prison cell. A young man is sitting hunched up on a chair in front of the cell window. Grey tones give the impression of sadness and closeness.

In the photographs of 1982 we can see – equally to Hbl – ingredients of drama, excitement: policemen performing "live" an arrest, working firemen, sport related scenes of struggle, a screaming demonstrator. In the pictures of 1997, similar motives have nearly disappeared. Instead, a trend, which flashes in the material of 1997, is the close picturing of individuals' faces (pictures 1, 2, 3 and 6). In addition, the photograph of the young prisoner is letting the observer come nearer him. The reason for photographs like these becoming the main picture is that close-ups have the ability to arouse interest, partly, because people can interpret feelings from facial expressions (e.g. Graber 1988, 166-174). DN is the only newspaper in our material that pictures politicians in a main picture (Fällidin, Ullsten), The formlike changes are remarkable. Colour pictures dominate the material of 1997. One picture, moreover, represents a type of an artistic watercolour painting. Over time, a clear and speaking sense of composition is to be seen here; a prolonged photo technique utilising depth of field, exposure, shadowing, colour nuances and angles in the pictures of 1997. Today's main pictures are undeniably, from an aesthetic point of view, speaking; and it seems to be a credible reason for choosing just these photographs to be the main pictures in this newspaper.

We can now present a summary of the observations above. Concerning the subject matter of the pictures, the occurrence of sport pictures among the main pictures is particularly notable in all the newspapers, especially in Hbl, both in the year 1982 and 1997. Thus, sport (soft news) gets a dominating position on the first pages (cf. Ekecrantz and Olsson 1994, 156). An explanation for this is that sport pictures offer aspired situations of motion, excitement, struggle, and drama.

Some pictures embrace people. Photographs of members of an elite (in politics, finance, and culture on the local, national or international level) are, however, unusual. Pictures of celebrities, which are typical for the tabloid-press, occur only in one newspaper; V-K. Instead, “common people” and athletes dominate the character gallery of main pictures.

It is, however, difficult both over time and between newspapers, to list clear patterns concerning the content of the pictures. Related to the aspects of form, clearer patterns can be distinguished though. Firstly, the change from black and white pictures to colour pictures is seen over time. Only in the national newspapers, DN and Hbl in 1997, can black and white pictures also be found (one picture and three pictures respectively). The main pictures have, in all newspapers, become both bigger and more colourful over time. Secondly, form consciousness and aesthetic ambitions have grown over time. Especially visible is this development in the national newspapers DN and Hbl. A likely development is to be seen also in V-K and Vbl, though less clearly. In the case of DN and HBL, the aesthetic and formlike qualities used by the photographers have probably played a role in the editorial choice for the main pictures during the subsequent researching point of time. Pictures with a kind of drama and excitement, which were notable in the year 1982 in these newspapers, have been replaced by another visualized format.

One of the main picture’s “outer contexts” is still worth mentioning. Concerning the main picture placement, some newspapers have begun to place the main picture in the middle of the page. Furthermore, since the main picture has become still larger, more colourful and also more aesthetic – and thus still more attention and interest arousing – there is a risk that the picture, in today’s glancing reading process, “parasites” on the traditional “hard news” which is normally placed in the upper left corner of the page (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 206). Hence, our final impression of the development of the main picture is not entirely positive.

## Conclusions

Our empirical study has concentrated on content and form of the front page. Therefore, we have separately examined the themes, which the news is emphasising. With this, we have intended to form an opinion on the newspapers’ degree of trivialization. Related to form, we have observed the degree of visualization and its manifestations.

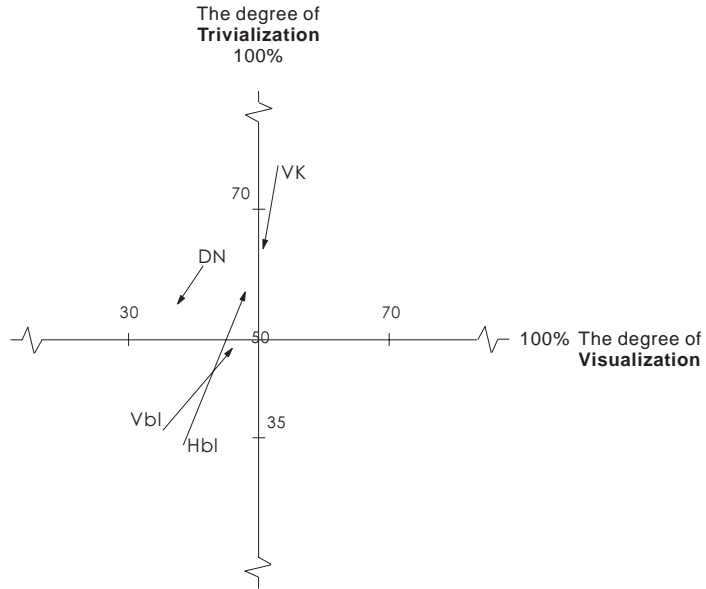
Earlier, our opinion was that visualization and trivialization together form the features which help to describe newspapers, both from a certain given time point, and over time. We can now raise a question as to how widely the newspapers have evolved in the direction of any of the extreme positions of the coordinate system (see Figure 1). Are they approaching the one that we called the normative ideal, a position with a relatively high degree of visualization, but with a dominance of serious socially relevant “hard news”? Alternatively, are the newspapers gliding to the field which we saw as being less desirable; tabloidization?

Unfortunately, the totality of our empirical observations fails to capture a clear and elegant conclusion. Instead, we can point to, and make conclusions over, our result concerning the degree of visualization in respect to trivialization. Thus, in figure 5 we have set the means for these features for each newspaper at both points of time. The trivialization degree consists here of the categories “soft news” and “news of crimes and accidents”.

The impression, which we can get from the figure, is, from a normative perspective, slightly alarming: The values of trivialization and visualization are relatively high. The differences between the countries is mainly based on the fact that the Finnish newspapers have powerfully developed towards this direction, while the Swedish newspapers have already earlier had high values in this aspect. Here, we must remember the earlier observation that the “soft news” was the most visualised. Furthermore, the photographs have developed in many aesthetic and interest arousing ways. It is selfevidently hard to produce pictures of this kind with a “hard news” theme. This can partly explain why the pictures relating to “hard news” occur so seldom, especially as the main picture on the front pages. Another partial explanation to the overwhelming preference for “soft” and visualised news is less obvious. Namely, it is possible that editors make the supposition that the readers prefer to read richly illustrated “soft” news, rather than news related to harder social questions. Newspapers’ commercial interests may have promoted such a policy. If this is the case, the newspapers, at least to a certain point, either intentionally or not, have given up their earlier, carefully followed journalistic ideals.

Knowing very well that the differences are not always especially large or completely statistically significant, we will still pay attention to the developmental tendencies linked to the context. We have often during this research had reason to suggest

Figure 5. *Trivialization and Visualization Tendencies 1982–1997*



that the Swedish newspapers, for better or worse, have been further along in development concerning both content-related and form-related aspects. Now it is shown, for example in Figure 5, that the Swedish newspapers are developing, even if only marginally, towards the opposite direction of the Finnish press. We can, of course, only speculate the reasons to this change. Two tentative explanations to the change are to be found; one is based on the sociologist Johan Asplund's discussion of saturation processes (Asplund 1967), the other on business-economical market logic.

Leaning on Asplund's concept, we mean that the journalistic organisation, i.e., editorial staff, has driven the development of visualization especially, and of trivialization, so far that the process is beginning to reach its saturation point. The process can no longer embrace innovative change, which is an important spurring element, seen from the professional journalists' perspective. The choice in the future will have two alternatives; either to lead visualization and trivialization further and more towards the earlier mentioned tabloidization; or to turn the development towards a new direction. The last mentioned alternative means that newspapers then could go towards lower visualization and/or trivialization. This would give space for more "hard news". Simultaneously, if the placement and importance of pictures in the future will not lose

their status, they could at least stay on the same level as they are today.

Actually, the market logic motive tells the same on behalf of reorientation. In sum, we have the opinion that since the majority of newspapers on the market has become relatively strongly visualized and trivialized, high values on these characteristics are not any more the way by arousing positive interest, to deviate from the crowd. The aim of being exclusive, which in other cultural fields creates distinction, leads on the mass media field to imitation and similitude (Bourdieu 1996, 20; cf. McManus 1994, 70). One could say that the actual innovation cycle is going to reach a full circle – a reason why the innovators who will create the next innovation should already be totally prepared to form a basis for this (cf. Djupsund 1997).

Combined, both the sociological and the business-economical deliberation is moving towards the same direction. This makes the developmental tendencies of the Swedish newspapers intelligible, and finds support in the successes that some newspapers have reached. The Danish *Jyllandsposten*, for example, has consciously chosen a rather different type of media logic for the basis of its operation. However, it does not seem especially probable that the whole newspaper industry will go through such a reorientation. Our final assumption is that we in the future, in the Nordic countries, will see a

much more differentiated newspaper diversity; and the readers' engagement to newspapers will show a high correlation to the reader's position in a more and clearly class-ridden society. In other words, in the future we will have two categories of press.

Firstly, there will be newspapers with high-quality coverage of public affairs for citizens with influence and a high standard of living. Secondly, there will be tabloids and tabloidized daily newspapers for the masses.

## Notes

1. It is important to observe that knowledge alone can neither assure participation or influence in decision-making. Knowledge is only a necessary, but not sufficient, precondition for the above to take place. Therefore, also the opposite holds true: An obvious lack of knowledge nearly makes it impossible for citizens to participate with influence in serious social decision-making.
2. The figure has been inspired by the pattern which McManus (1994, 122) developed in order to shed light on the conflict between the commercial and the traditional journalistic news criteria. The vertical axis in McManus' figure presents the "orientation value", a traditionally journalistic normative criterion: the news has to give the citizens a possibility to orientate towards serious socially related questions. The horizontal axis in McManus' figure represents "entertainment value" and embraces the commercial news logic that maximises profit. The "entertainment index" that McManus creates, includes the criteria "human interest, conflict, unusualness, amusement and visual quality". In our adapted model, the horizontal axis, visualization, is thus an aspect of the entertainment value. Our vertical axis, trivialization, has the same aspect as McManus' "orientation value": The lower the trivialization, the higher the orientation value.
3. These categories need closer explanation. The material that we call "hard news" is mainly the same as "serious socially oriented news", that can be found in, inter alia, a Swedish press investigation (SOU 1975, 72). It embraces two main areas. Firstly, politics = events in the political life; related to political decisions or with attention to political organisations, authorities etc. Secondly, economy = events in the working life, production (enterprises and labour market) and consumption (living standard etc). The "hard news" also embraces, among others, news abroad, news related to the official administration, social organisation, and environmental questions. The category that we call "soft news" embraces news topics that cannot be coded into the earlier mentioned category. "Soft news" covers material about leisure activities (e.g. sport); culture (if the cultural activities do not concern political or economic aspects); personal profiles (e.g. celebrities); weather; and conventional entertaining "human interest" themes. The last category, "news of crimes and accidents" needs no explanation.

## References

- Altheide, David and Robert Snow (1992) *Media Worlds in the Postjournalism Era*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Asp, Kent (1995) *Kommersialiserade TV-nyheter på gott och ont. Jämförande undersökning av Rapport TV2 och Nyheterna TV4*. Göteborgs Universitet: Institutionen för journalistik and masskommunikation, arbetsrapport nr 50.
- Asplund, Johan (1967) *Om mättnadsprocesser*. Uppsala: Argos.
- Barthes, Roland (1986) "The Photographic Message", pp. 15-31 in S. Heath (ed.) *Image – Music – Text*. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Becker, Karin (1997) *The Picture's Place in 20th Century Journalism. An Overview of the Swedish Press*. Paper presented at the 13th Nordic conference on mass communication research, Jyväskylä 9-12 August.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1996) *Sur la télévision. Suivi de L'emprise du journalisme*. Paris: Liber éditions.
- Djupsund, Göran (1997) "Förvaltningssyner i omvandling. Cyklisk variation och diffusion", pp. 107-129 in V. Helander and S. Sandberg (eds.) *Festskrift till Krister Ståhlberg*. Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag.
- Ekecrantz, Jan and Tom Olsson (1994) *Det redigerade samhället. Om journalistikens, beskrivningsmaktens och det informerade förnufts historia*. Stockholm: Carlssons.
- Graber, Doris (1988) *Processing the News. How People Tame the Information Tide*. New York & London: Longman.
- Graber, Doris (1996) "Say it with Pictures", pp. 85-96 in K. Jamieson (ed.) *The Media and Politics*. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 546.
- Helland, Knut (1995) *Public Service and Commercial News. Contexts of Production, Genre Conventions and Textual Claims in Television*. Universitetet i Bergen: Institutet för medievitenskap, rapport nr. 18.
- Henning, Carl (1995) "Nej till amerikaniseringen?", pp. 18-29 in P. Baugstø and T. Degnes (eds.) *Visuell visjon – i fritt fall? Skråblikk på nordisk avisdesign*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hjarvard, Stig (1995) *Nyhedsmediernes rolle i det politiske demokrati*. København: Statsministeriets Medieudvalg.
- Hvitfelt, Håkan (1985) *På första sidan. En studie i nyhetsvärdering*. Stockholm: Beredskapsnämnden för psykologiskt försvar.

- Hvitfelt, Håkan (1994) "The Commercialization of the Evening News. Changes in Narrative Technique in Swedish TV News", *Nordicom Review* 2:33-41.
- Klite, Paul (1995) "Tabloid Fever: The Syndrome of Local TV News Excess", *Television Quarterly* 27:25-32.
- Klite, Paul, Bardwell, Robert and Jason Salzman (1997) "Local TV-news: Getting Away with Murder", *Press/Politics* 2:102-112.
- Kress, Gunther and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge.
- McManus, John (1994) *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?* Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Postman, Neil (1986) *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Rehe, Rolf (1985) *Typography and Design for Newspapers*. Darmstadt: IFRA.
- SOU (1975) *Svensk press. Pressens funktioner i samhället*. Stockholm: Statens Offentliga Utredningar 1975:78.
- Ståhlberg, Krister and Voitto Helander (1972) *Den kommunala demokratin. Teoretiska och metodologiska överväganden kring ett forskningsprojekt*. Meddelanden från institutet för samhällsforskning, Åbo Akademi, B:18.

### Appendix 1. The Numeric Material in the Figures

Newspaper		Hard News (%)	Soft News (%)	Crimes and Accidents (%)	Visual Material (%)	The Main Picture (%)
VBL 1982	Mean	68,50	29,00	4,67	35,17	13,50
	Std. dev.	10,27	12,66	1,53	6,37	4,26
VBL 1997	Mean	61,33	33,50	10,00	44,17	26,39
	Std. dev.	30,87	29,10	6,08	8,38	3,37
HBL 1982	Mean	67,57	31,86	1,50	35,86	13,84
	Std. dev.	14,47	14,10	,71	9,26	2,67
HBL 1997	Mean	48,29	50,29	5,00	47,86	28,32
	Std. dev.	12,91	13,38	5,66	4,74	4,35
V-K 1982	Mean	33,17	55,00	17,75	52,17	27,11
	Std. dev.	17,65	17,61	9,67	6,43	4,83
V-K 1997	Mean	40,83	51,50	9,20	51,00	31,39
	Std. dev.	27,72	25,11	4,60	3,74	6,49
DN 1982	Mean	51,00	36,57	21,75	42,43	20,39
	Std. dev.	20,11	18,22	23,98	4,89	3,88
DN 1997	Mean	48,29	41,29	12,33	39,14	34,49
	Std. dev.	20,14	18,63	19,35	4,30	4,07

