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## Towards hybridity? Nationality, ownership and governance of news agencies in Europe

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Abstract:	This article explores the nationality, ownership and governance of news agencies drawing on recent data from a pan-European study. It suggests that the concept of hybridity could be applied to analyzing news agencies' nationality, ownership and governance. It reviews the concept through different fields: (1) cultural studies; (2) organizational studies, and (3) political-regime and media-system studies, each of these contributing to a complementary understanding of the concept. By using the concept of hybridity when analyzing news agencies, we are able to see crossing boundaries of earlier ideal types and even develop possible alternative approaches to studying news agencies in Europe.

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## Towards hybridity? Nationality, ownership, and governance of news agencies in Europe.

### Abstract

This article explores the nationality, ownership and governance of news agencies in Europe and suggests that we need to re-think and problematize the categories previously used when studying these. Drawing on recent data from a pan-European study, the article suggests that the concept of hybridity could be applied to analyzing news agencies' nationality, ownership and governance. It reviews the concept through different fields: (1) cultural studies; (2) organizational studies, and (3) political-regime and media-system studies, each of these contributing to a complementary understanding of the concept of hybridity. It concludes that: (1) the previously fixed categories of national and international news agencies have become more integrated; (2) the different ownership forms of national news agencies have been partly amalgamated in terms of both owners and clients, and (3) ownership category alone cannot determine whether governance is democratic or non-democratic, so we also need to look at governance. The article suggests that, by using the concept of hybridity when analyzing news agencies, we are able to see crossing boundaries of earlier ideal types and even developing possible alternative approaches to studying news agencies in future.

**Key words:** news agencies, nationality, ownership, governance, hybridity, cooperative, private, state, public, Europe, organizations

### Introduction

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6 Witschge et al. (2019) have recently argued that the field of journalism studies has  
7 overused the concept of hybridity, and that it is time to move towards new concepts.  
8 They (Witschge et al., 2019, p. 654) give several examples of how what they call a  
9 hybrid turn in journalism studies has given rise to the use of new blurred categories,  
10 for example those of produsagers (Bruns, 2006), of media cultures (Hermida and  
11 Young, 2017), of forms of production (Papacharissi, 2015), and of political  
12 campaigning (Wells et al., 2016). However, so far the hybrid turn has not yet  
13 become evident in news-agency studies, and in this article I argue the opposite: that  
14 in order to be able to develop fresh approaches to news-agency studies in Europe  
15 we need to re-explore the concept of hybridity, drawing on not just one but three  
16 different strands of literature: (1) cultural studies; (2) organizational studies, and (3)  
17 political-regime and media-system studies.  
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28 This is important because the existence and continuity of national news agencies –  
29 since these are the oldest electronic media organizations in Europe – has been  
30 taken for granted for a very long time. There is a national news agency in every  
31 European country except Estonia, Ireland and Iceland, and they still play a  
32 significant role as intermediary organizations that provide their service to most media  
33 in the country concerned, and also – through their own networks – beyond it.  
34 However, as a recent report (Rantanen et al., 2019a) shows, many of them are  
35 confronting a crisis that has threatened their viability and very existence. Their  
36 changing role or potential disappearance is crucial to any analysis of media  
37 transformation, but news agencies remain under-researched when compared with  
38 many other media, especially social media, and more updated research with  
39 alternative study approaches is needed.  
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51 Furthermore, the theorization of news agencies has often been based on fixed,  
52 taken-for-granted “either/or” categories concerning their nationality, ownership,  
53 operations and markets. In this article I argue that these categories no longer  
54 entirely hold (if they ever did) and that news agencies today are more complex and  
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3 more mixed, both within and across these categories. I use the results from a recent  
4 pan-European study (Rantanen et al., 2019a) to problematize these categories and  
5 to put forward an argument about the usefulness of the concept of hybridity in  
6 analyzing news agencies in future.  
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### 10 11 12 13 **Previous research on news agencies** 14 15 16 17

18 A good deal of academic research has focused on international news agencies and  
19 on the globalization of news (see, for example, Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Boyd-Barrett and  
20 Palmer, 1980; Alleyne and Wagner, 1993; Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 1997; Giffard  
21 and Rivenburgh, 2000; Paterson, 2011). There is also an overemphasis on historical  
22 research. Much of the scarce research on news agencies is nowadays the work of  
23 media historians (see, for example, Renaud, 1985; Silberstein-Loeb, 2014; Vyslozil  
24 with Wittenberg, 2014; Tworek, 2019).  
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32 There has been a distinct preference for research on privately owned agencies,  
33 resulting in one-sidedness and in an ignoring of state ownership in Europe (except –  
34 but this is now outdated – Rantanen and Boyd-Barrett, 2005). Finally, there is very  
35 little research on European national agencies in general. The last studies of  
36 European national news agencies date from 2000 (Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Boyd-Barrett  
37 and Rantanen, 2000).  
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### 45 **Conceptual framework** 46 47

48 If empirical research on national news agencies has recently been lacking, the  
49 absence of theoretical and/or conceptual thinking has also been very striking. Either  
50 they have not been theorized at all or, when they have been theorized, this has been  
51 with the use of concepts that mainly concentrate on the relationship between  
52 international and national news organizations, that is emphasizing how dependent  
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3 national agencies are on international agencies for their exchange of news, and that  
4 this relationship is uneven (see, for example, Meyer, 1989). The division between  
5 international and national news agencies, where the former have been viewed more  
6 negatively and the latter as often unproblematically positive, has often taken  
7 attention away from the study of national agencies and presented the division  
8 between international and national as the most significant factor, as if other factors  
9 were insignificant. The two categories of international and national have not always  
10 been problematized and thus have been taken for granted.  
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19 The other categorization taken for granted is that of ownership. In the past, news  
20 agencies have traditionally been categorized and divided in terms of their ownership  
21 into: (1) private; (2) cooperative, and (3) state (UNESCO, 1953). A recent report  
22 suggests a new categorization of news-agency ownership into: (1) private; (2) state,  
23 and (3) public (Rantanen et al., 2019a). The ideal form of ownership of news  
24 agencies has always been a contested issue among both academics and  
25 practitioners. It has not helped that news agencies are absent from so many studies  
26 of media ownership (see, for example, Djankov, McLiesh and Nenova, 2001; Noam,  
27 2016; Dragomir, 2018), of cultural economy and creative industries (De Beukelaer  
28 and Spence, 2019) and of media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) – this although  
29 national news agencies are to be found in most countries around the world. Almost  
30 nothing has been written about news-agency governance since the UNESCO study  
31 in 1953 (UNESCO, 1953).  
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43 Another dimension of discussions around media ownership, and perhaps particularly  
44 news-agency ownership, is polarization. There are those who argue that either  
45 private or cooperative ownership guarantees the most objective news content, while  
46 government ownership is seen as the enemy of a free flow of news (see, for  
47 example, Champagne, 2005). The private, and especially the cooperative,  
48 ownership models have been seen as ideal models for guaranteeing, as a former  
49 director of the Associated Press (AP) put it, “true and unbiased” news (Cooper,  
50 1942), while the state ownership model has not received similar praise. Leading  
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3 international news agencies Reuters and AP have both crusaded for private or  
4 cooperative ownership forms as a guarantee of the freedom of news (Mant, 1939;  
5 Cooper, 1942). This discourse is still often shared by both academics and news-  
6 agency executives (Rantanen and Kelly, 2019).  
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11 The new data (Rantanen et al, 2019a) calls for new academic research and  
12 alternative concepts. In this article I suggest that the concept of hybridity could be  
13 useful when studying news agencies. The reason for doing this is that the present  
14 “container model”, where news agencies are separated from each other solely on  
15 the basis of their nationality and ownership form, is in my view unhelpful when  
16 attempting to analyze changing news agency operations. Because ownership is  
17 viewed so ideologically – often “us against them” (Rantanen and Kelly, 2019), using  
18 fixed categories of nationality and/or ownership prevents us from seeing what all  
19 news agencies share, irrespective of their nationality and/or ownership form.  
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29 Here I use the concept of hybridity originating from the natural sciences, where it  
30 denotes “the offspring of two animals or plants of different specie” (Hybrid, n. and  
31 adj., 2019). The concept has been “borrowed” by cultural, journalism and post-  
32 colonial studies, political science, organizational, management and even warfare  
33 studies – to mention just a few – but not used in news-agency studies. Anheier and  
34 Krlev (2014, p. 1395) call hybridity an “umbrella concept that can be applied to a  
35 multitude of organizational phenomena.” I argue here that by using the concept of  
36 hybridity when analyzing news agencies, we are able to see what has not been seen  
37 before, crossing the rigid boundaries of earlier ideal types and even developing  
38 alternative approaches to studying news agencies. In the following section, I first  
39 review how the concept of hybridity has been defined in some of the fields I consider  
40 relevant.  
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## 51 1. The concept of hybridity in cultural and post-colonial studies

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3 In cultural studies, Garcia-Canclini (1989) has described Latin American countries as  
4 hybrid cultures where “previously separate cultural systems mingle, symbolic  
5 interactions are de-territorialized, and impure genres rule” (Kraidy, 1999, p. 460). As  
6 Kraidy goes on to write (p. 460), the usefulness of Garcia-Canclini's approach lies in  
7 how he considers local/global interactions as a “hybridity” of both *process* and  
8 product, rejecting the *polarity* between *global* (production and dissemination) and  
9 *local* (reception) aspects of mass-mediated culture (my emphasis). As Kraidy (2002,  
10 p. 317) also observes, hybridity needs to be understood as a “communicative  
11 practice constitutive of, and constituted by, socio-political and economic  
12 arrangements.”  
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22 In post-colonial studies, Bhabha (1994) is acknowledged as having introduced the  
23 concept of hybridity in order to analyze cultures and identities, their “impurity” and  
24 “mixed-ness.” He uses the term hybridity rather than hybridization, insisting that  
25 hybridity is an ongoing process, since cultures, rather than being solid and authentic,  
26 are unexpected, messy, hybrid and fortuitous. The starting point is never a “pure”  
27 culture, but that cultures are born after the hybridity process rather than existing  
28 before it (Huddart, 2006, pp. 1, 4, 5, 99).  
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36 Garcia-Canclini, Bhabha and Kraidy all define the concept of hybridity in the contexts  
37 of culture, media and identity. They all emphasize the non-polarity of cultural forms  
38 and their interconnectivity and “impurity.” They, like many cultural and globalization  
39 theorists (Rantanen, 2019b), have argued against an unambiguous division between  
40 the international and the national, and proposed new levels of analysis including the  
41 local. Their approach is rather general, and not necessarily useful when studying  
42 news agencies except when discussing their nationality. This is why I need to bring  
43 in the notion of hybridity as found in the study of organizations.  
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## 51 2. The concept of hybridity in organizational studies

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3 The concept of hybridity (or hybridization, both terms are used) first became popular  
4 in this field with reference to third-sector, non-profit, voluntary, civil-society and NGO  
5 organizations that were difficult to study because of their “fragmentation, fuzziness,  
6 and constant change” (Brandsen, van de Donk and Putters, 2005, p. 749). These  
7 organizations had different institutional logics, but often with a mission of societal  
8 change (Haigh and Hoffman, 2012, p. 127). Hybrid organizations can most broadly  
9 be defined as “heterogeneous arrangements, characterized by mixtures of pure and  
10 incongruous origins, (ideal) types, ‘cultures,’ ‘coordination mechanisms,’  
11 ‘rationalities,’ or ‘action logics’” (Brandsen, Van de Donk and Putters, 2005, p. 750)  
12 that mix the characteristics of state, market and civil society. Hybrid organizations  
13 may be anything from purely governmental agencies to commercial firms, and can  
14 both function like “customer oriented and efficient firms and/or carry out intrinsically  
15 public tasks” (Kickert, 2001, p. 148).  
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27 Many authors (Minkoff, 2002; Brandsen, Van de Donk and Putters, 2005; Smith  
28 2010) argue that hybridity reflects the restructuring role of the state in a financial  
29 crisis and how non-profit organizations respond to this in an uncertain environment.  
30 While earlier studies of organizations divided them by categories of ownership,  
31 funding and mode of social control, Billis (2010, pp. 48-49) writes that if ownership  
32 is taken as the primary category it leaves third-sector organizations excluded from  
33 any categorization, and that this is why it has become equally important to study  
34 governance (Cornforth and Spear, 2010, p. 73). Hybrid organizations can be seen  
35 as presenting complex governance challenges (Smith, 2010), and more recent  
36 research has emphasized the need for multi-layered analysis (Brandsen and Karré,  
37 2011), including measurement of performance, innovation, regulation, and  
38 sustainability (Skelcher and Smith, 2017).  
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49 These studies show us that the concept of hybrid organizations has become  
50 established in this field of study, where they are seen as new types of organizations  
51 with mixed ownership and governance. These studies help us to understand that all  
52 organizations do not fit into categories based solely on ownership, but that we also  
53 need to look at other factors that define them. However, in order to understand  
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3 media organizations, and specifically news agencies, I also need to review the  
4 concepts of hybrid regimes and of hybrid media systems.  
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### 8 9 3. The concepts of a hybrid regime and a hybrid media system 10

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12 The relationship between a political and a media system has been seen as  
13 unquestioned. The definition of a media system usually implies its dependence on a  
14 specific political system (Engesser and Franzetti, 2011, p. 277). According to  
15 Almond and Powell (1966, pp. 3–4), this interdependence means that when the  
16 properties of one component in a system change, all other components also change  
17 and the system as a whole is affected. In their and in media-system models, the  
18 degree of state control or intervention plays a key role (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995;  
19 Hallin and Mancini, 2004), which then directly or indirectly determines how  
20 democratic the system is. (Rantanen, 2013, p. 260).  
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30 The idea of a media system emerged from political science, which classified political  
31 systems and regimes into democratic or non-democratic categories. Diamond (2002,  
32 p. 33) argues that these classificatory schemes have reached their end and now  
33 “impose an uneasy order on an untidy empirical world.” Diamond puts forward an  
34 argument that regimes have become more and more “mixed,” and that “the black  
35 and white distinctions between democratic and non-democratic regimes have now  
36 turned into different shades of grey.” He recalls (2002, p. 33) research that  
37 recognizes these differences:  
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45 As democracies differ among themselves in significant ways and degrees, so do  
46 contemporary authoritarian regimes, and if we are to understand the contemporary  
47 dynamics, causes, limits, and possibilities of regime change (including possible  
48 future democratization), we must understand the different, and in some respects  
49 new, types of authoritarian rule.  
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3 Chadwick (2013) argues that it is not only regimes but *media systems* that are also  
4 becoming more hybrid (p. 15). In a hybrid system, according to Chadwick (2013, pp.  
5 4-5), “hybrid thinking rejects simple dichotomies, nudging us away from ‘either/or’  
6 patterns of thought and toward ‘not only but also’ patterns of thought” (p. 4). The  
7 “simultaneous integration and fragmentation” (Chadwick, 2013, p. 15) happens not  
8 only between different media sectors but also inside them. Both observations are  
9 useful to this article because boundary fetishism, as Chadwick points out, is not  
10 unknown in the social sciences. As he writes, “attempts to control, police, and  
11 redraw boundaries, and the power struggles that criss-cross domains are important  
12 defining features of contemporary political communication” (Chadwick, 2013, p. 15).  
13 News agencies, as part of a media system, are also influenced by these changes in  
14 organizational structure, as this article explores. As Tsuruel et al. (2019, p. 5) write, in  
15 a media system we may find blurred boundaries between roles, identities and  
16 norms, and changes in organizational structure and news production  
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30 The concept of hybridity can be used in regime and media-system studies in three  
31 different ways: to challenge (1) the set-in-stone division between democratic and  
32 undemocratic regimes, or (2) the separation of older and newer media logics, or (3)  
33 to argue for a blurring of boundaries between the system’s key components, such as  
34 news agencies, including organizational structures. This is why I propose that the  
35 concept of hybridity in regime and media-system studies may help us to understand  
36 how news agencies have changed.  
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#### 44 **Research questions and materials**

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47 In this article I use the concept of hybridity to study the nationality, ownership and  
48 governance of national news agencies in Europe. I concentrate specifically on  
49 ownership, including nationality and governance, but not on their operations or  
50 markets, which have been studied separately and using the concept of diversity  
51 (Surm, 2019; Jääskeläinen and Yanatma, 2019).  
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5 My research question here is:  
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8 To what extent, if any, is the concept of hybridity manifested in studying news  
9 agencies with respect to the categories of national and international, to forms of  
10 ownership, and to forms of governance?  
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15 This article draws empirically on data collected as part of the pan-European  
16 research project on The Future of National News Agencies in Europe, conducted in  
17 collaboration with the European Alliance of News Agencies (EANA) and based at the  
18 London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) (Rantanen et al., 2019a).  
19 EANA has 32 national news agencies as members, with one agency – except in the  
20 case of the Baltic states – as an institutional member from each European country,  
21 as well as from Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine (About EANA, 2020). A  
22 survey was conducted in 2018, in which 25 of the 32 EANA member agencies  
23 participated (their CEOs or other members of their senior management filled out the  
24 questionnaire). Due to the possibility of sensitive business information being raised,  
25 all participants were assured of full confidentiality and anonymity. This is why it is not  
26 possible to identify individual news agencies. This article is based largely on an  
27 analysis of the survey results, but also uses, when possible, publicly available data  
28 on news agency ownership (Rantanen et al., 2019a).  
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## 41 **Discussion and results**

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### 46 1. The categories of national and international agencies

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49 Taking Garcia-Canclini's concept of hybridity to reject the polarity between the global  
50 and the national, one could use it to challenge the concept of nationality of national  
51 news agencies. One of the longest-standing divisions drawn by news-agency  
52 research is between “international” and “national” agencies (UNESCO, 1953). This  
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3 division goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when three European news agencies, Havas,  
4 Reuter, and Wolff, established a news cartel by dividing the world's news market  
5 among themselves. These three international agencies were the only ones that  
6 could operate outside their own home countries, while national agencies could only  
7 operate in their own countries (see, for example, Rantanen, 2009).  
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13 Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has been argued that every country should have its own  
14 national news agency, which would serve national interests. News agencies were  
15 largely a European invention and, apart from the Associated Press (AP) in the USA,  
16 most of the early national news agencies were founded in Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and  
17 early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Rantanen, 2009). It has long been taken for granted that  
18 national news agencies have a "nationality," as their names reflect – for example,  
19 Norsk Telegrambyrå (Norwegian Telegraph Agency, NTB), or Agence  
20 Télégraphique Suisse/Schweizerische Depeschentagentur (Swiss Telegraph  
21 Agency, SDA) – and that the nationality and/or location is a crucial factor in  
22 analyzing their influence (Tunstall, 1977). This assumes that ownership, location of  
23 headquarters and language(s) always coincide. It has also been assumed that the  
24 ownership of national news agencies, even if they operate internationally, should be  
25 in domestic hands (Rantanen, 2019).  
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38 However, this is not necessarily any longer the case. Most national news agencies in  
39 Europe have long provided their services in countries other than their own. Their  
40 decisions to provide a service outside their home countries have been prompted by  
41 language, capital flows (clients interested in their news service), new avenues of  
42 profitability, or by geopolitical factors (for example, historical links, neighboring  
43 location of countries) (Bhat, 2018). We have also witnessed the first signs of change  
44 in terms of national agencies turning their operations into regional ones and of  
45 ownership shifting into a neighboring country in terms both of operation and of  
46 ownership. The Estonian Telegraph Agency (ETA), founded in 1920, went bankrupt  
47 in 2003 and for the first time since it was founded there was no national news  
48 agency in Estonia. The Baltic News Service (BNS), established in 1991 in Moscow  
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3 to cover all the Baltic countries, was bought by the Finnish media corporation Alma  
4 Media in 1998 and operated as a national agency in Estonia. Alma Media sold it in  
5 2014 to an Estonian businessman. Today, there are two branches: BNS Estonia and  
6 BNS Lithuania (Lauk and Einmann, 2019, p. 3). In Switzerland, in 2018, the national  
7 news agency Schweizerische Depeschagentur/ Agence télégraphique suisse/  
8 Agenzia telegrafica svizzera (SDA-ATS) was merged with Keystone AG, a picture  
9 agency, which was 50-per cent owned by the Austrian national news agency Austria  
10 Presse Agentur (APA). After the merger APA became 30-per cent owner of the  
11 merged company (SDA und Keystone fusionieren, NZZ, 2018).  
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20 National news agencies also have international aspirations (Table 1). According to  
21 Rantanen et al. (2019a), 96 per cent of news-agency executives agreed with the  
22 argument that a national news agency is vital to national media and should be kept  
23 alive, but at the same time 88 per cent agreed strongly that national news agencies  
24 should pursue more international collaboration (Bhat, 2018).  
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31 Figure 1 here.  
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35 It is still possible to divide news agencies into the two categories of international and  
36 national if we consider their size, and the number of their correspondents and  
37 clients, as Vyzlosil and Sturm (2019) have suggested. But news agencies have  
38 always been both international and national, since the *raison d'être* of their activities  
39 has been news transmission across national borders, even when national news  
40 agencies' activities were restricted by the international news cartel. What we see  
41 now is that national ownership has in a few cases turned into regional ownership  
42 beyond the borders of the nation-state where the agency is located. We also see the  
43 aspiration of most national news agencies in Europe to operate outside their home  
44 countries.  
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## 55 2. Forms of ownership 56 57 58 59 60

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5 According to Grossi and Thomasson (2015, p. 605), hybrid organizations are those  
6 that borrow components and logics from three different sectors: public, private and  
7 non-profit. Since, as far as I know, there are no studies that investigate news  
8 agencies as hybrid organizations in terms of their ownership, in this section we  
9 concentrate on how news agencies have become hybrid both within and across  
10 categories of ownership.  
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19 Table 1 here  
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25 There have been changes in all categories of ownership, but even more within  
26 different ownership forms. The co-operative ownership form has practically  
27 disappeared in Europe, as has the *non-profit-making* corporation (UNESCO, 1953,  
28 p. 43) without shareholders or other commercial forms of ownership. In the survey  
29 results from 2017, nine news agencies defined themselves as private shareholder  
30 companies (see Table 2) where the majority of shares are owned by shareholders or  
31 by one shareholder (Rantanen et al., 2019a. p. 5). As Jääskeläinen and Yanatma  
32 (2019a, p. 5) write, the “agencies turned from cost-sharing cooperatives into profit-  
33 seeking media services companies, taking risks and aiming to create a return on  
34 capital for the owners. This has fundamentally changed the capabilities needed by  
35 the firms.”  
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46 The state-ownership category has become much more diversified than previously  
47 thought (Rantanen and Boyd-Barrett, 2005). Half of agencies in the state-ownership  
48 category could be defined in terms of the state being the sole owner, while for the  
49 other half the ownership structure consisted of different combinations (Bhat, 2018)  
50 where the state was one of the shareholders. The state needs the market and  
51 cannot maintain its ownership without private revenues except in those agencies  
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3 that give their products to customers free of charge. State-owned agencies are also  
4 vulnerable and not always able to survive, especially in small markets (Lauk and  
5 Einmann, 2019).  
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10 Vyslozil and Wittenberg (2014, p. 30) suggest a new category of public (service)  
11 news agencies. A public agency may be financially supported by the state, while not  
12 owned or controlled by the state but by parliament or another type of public  
13 organization (Rantanen et al., 2019a, p. 7). In 2017, six European agencies  
14 reported themselves as public news agencies (Table 2). This was why the  
15 researchers decided to define a new category of public agency, as distinct from that  
16 of state agency, although this category was not included in their original survey  
17 questions.  
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26 However, even the concept of a publicly owned agency is difficult to define. For  
27 example, AFP, which was previously defined as a state agency, can now be defined  
28 as a public agency. It was founded under the joint control of the French government  
29 and the French press in 1944, under the terms of a law that would ensure the  
30 agency's financial stability and independence from the state (UNESCO, 1953, p. 36).  
31 As Juntunen and Nieminen (2019, p. 4) write, "the sui generis status given to the  
32 agency makes it neither a state-owned nor a commercial entity, which differentiates  
33 AFP both from other global news agencies operating purely on a commercial basis  
34 and from those operating under the direct control of the governments that finance  
35 them."  
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45 One of the features defining news agencies is that their owners are also their clients.  
46 When defining ownership only through the owners, we often forget that all news  
47 agencies need clients. This is true especially of the private ones, since their  
48 existence is based on profitability (Jääskeläinen and Yamatna, 2019b), but it would  
49 be impossible for any agency to survive losing all its clients, even if they were non-  
50 paying clients. All news agencies are to a certain extent dependent on publicly  
51 funded institutions as their clients, as Table 3 shows. The state may be an important  
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3 source of income from subscription fees: 13 news agencies reported that around 40  
4 percent of their total revenue came from public or political institutions (Bhat, 2018).  
5 In short, private ownership may coexist with dependence on state financial support  
6 and/or on a public-service broadcaster as a client (Yle jatkaa STT: n asiakkaana,  
7 2017; Finnish gov't approves €1.5m subsidy for struggling news agency STT, 2018),  
8 as happened in Finland.  
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15 Figure 2 here.  
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20 When we study the ownership of national news agencies in Europe, it is clearly seen  
21 that categorization by “pure” ownership forms is over. Mixed ownership forms cross  
22 different categories of ownership, especially when we take into account clients with a  
23 double role as owners. Private ownership also loses its “purity” through state funding  
24 of private agencies and through public service broadcasting companies being their  
25 clients. In short, most agencies combine the organizational logics of three different  
26 sectors: public, private and state – either through their owners or through their  
27 clients.  
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### 35 3. Forms of governance 36 37 38

39 One of the issues raised by studies of hybrid organizations is governance, which is  
40 often neglected by news agency studies that concentrate only on ownership. The  
41 challenge for hybrid organizations, as Jason (2013, p. 137) writes, is to combine the  
42 different logics of government bureaucracies, business firms and non-profit  
43 associations. Since we need to determine whether news agencies can be called  
44 hybrid organizations in terms of their governance, we first need to find out who the  
45 decision makers are in these organizations.  
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52 When it comes to the profitability of media-owned companies, as shown earlier,  
53 some of their clients play a double role as both owners and clients. Within the  
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3 category of private news agencies, the ownership of many agencies has shifted to a  
4 structure in which a single media company or a small group of media companies  
5 owns a controlling proportion of shares (Rantanen et al., 2019a, p. 5).  
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8 Simultaneously, their governance has shifted from a cooperative to a corporate  
9 ownership form, where the largest shareholders make major decisions, in place of  
10 cooperative governance that was based, at least in principle, on more democratic  
11 decision-making.  
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17 Figure 3 here  
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20 While in private agencies the owners always appoint the board, in state and public  
21 news agencies it was previously parliament and/or the state. However, in the 2019  
22 study (Rantanen et al., 2019a), there were shown to also be many agencies that did  
23 not fit either of these models (Bhat, 2018), again problematizing the clear-cut  
24 divisions between different forms of governance. In most cases, even where  
25 government or state representatives are involved in board appointments, their  
26 influence is only through an intermediary institution like a council or a foundation. It  
27 is also limited by the involvement of other industry or civil-society representation  
28 aimed at counterbalancing government or state influence (Rantanen et al., 2019a, p.  
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39 In some publicly owned news agencies, board members are appointed by  
40 parliament, while in others they are appointed through other processes. In some  
41 cases, for example, employees may nominate a board member, while in others  
42 councils are appointed by the President, parliament, experts or government  
43 representatives (Rantanen et al., 2019a, p. 7). The main aim of these strategies  
44 seems to be the creation of an “arms-length” relationship between the state or  
45 government and the board appointments process. For example, some news  
46 agencies make board appointments through a public media foundation, while others  
47 appoint their boards through a council consisting in its turn of representatives of  
48 parliament. There are other strategies that also attempt to balance the power  
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3 equations in the appointments process (Rantanen et al., 2019a, p. 7).  
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6 Publicly owned and financed news agencies are also vulnerable to political and  
7 financial pressures from outside. Their constitution is not set in stone, but can  
8 change with a new governmental majority. Some of the agencies founded as public  
9 news agencies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) after Communism collapsed  
10 now seem to be under increasing government control. For example, following the  
11 passage of a new media law (Opinion of the Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011)  
12 in Hungary in 2010, the Hungarian news agency MTI, as a part of the public-service  
13 media, was placed under the new National Media Council. While critics see this as a  
14 new centralized news-production system that threatens the public media's diversity  
15 and pluralism, the Hungarian government claims that the new system is more cost-  
16 effective and efficient, while still safeguarding the autonomy of Hungary's public  
17 media (Public service media, n.d.). In short, news agencies seldom have more  
18 safeguards from government control than a national PSB company in the same  
19 country.  
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32 When it comes to the state's role as legislator and regulator, there are special laws  
33 on the status of state-owned agencies. But it is not only the nation-state that  
34 legislates for news agencies in the European Union. As Juntunen and Nieminen  
35 (2019, p. 6) point out, EU state-aid rules now set the framework for state funding in  
36 member countries and this also affects state funding of national news agencies  
37 (recent decisions have concerned AFP in France, EFE in Spain and STT in Finland,  
38 which all had received state funding). The EU state-aid rules are another example of  
39 cross-border hybridity, where a "national" institution is also governed by a regional  
40 organization.  
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51 Governance of national news agencies in Europe predominantly reflects their  
52 ownership. However, when one looks more closely at what is happening inside and  
53 outside these organizations, one starts to see more similarities across ownership  
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3 forms. The conflicts that arise from attempts to combine the different logics of state,  
4 private companies, and public organizations are not easy to solve and the boundary  
5 problems inside and outside organizations come to the surface as a result of their  
6 different interests. We start to see mixed forms of governance where, as Diamond  
7 (2002, p. 33) suggests, “the black and white have now turned into different shades of  
8 grey.”  
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## 15 **Conclusion**

19 In this article I have argued that we still need the concept of hybridity in order to  
20 better understand the crisis that national news agencies in Europe are currently  
21 experiencing. Using the concept of hybridity as defined in (1) cultural studies, (2)  
22 organizational studies and (3) political-regime and media-system studies, I have  
23 explored three fixed categories earlier used in news agency studies: (1) nationality,  
24 (2) ownership, and (3) governance of national news agencies in Europe. I have  
25 argued, on the basis of data from a recent survey and since they are the oldest  
26 electronic media organizations in Europe, that:  
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- 33 - The previously fixed categories of national and international news agencies  
34 may have become more integrated.
- 35 - Different ownership forms of national news agencies in Europe may have  
36 been partly amalgamated through their owners and clients.
- 37 - Ownership category may not be the only factor determining whether  
38 governance is democratic or non-democratic.
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45 But why did we need to review here three sets of literature on hybridity rather than  
46 using only one? I would argue that each approach complements the others and  
47 makes an additional contribution. A cultural studies approach clearly focuses on  
48 cross-national border activities that are not seen as important in media-systems or  
49 organizational-studies approaches. When we study news agencies, even national  
50 agencies, we simply cannot completely separate their international from their  
51 national activities. We are now seeing the emergence of the new regional news  
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3 agencies that are no longer in national ownership, and all agencies in the EU are  
4 also subject to supra-national legislation. This further complicates the governance of  
5 news agencies, which need to combine different organizational logics not only inside  
6 their country of location but also outside it. Neither a media-system nor an  
7 organizational-studies approach alone would have been able to help us to  
8 understand this change.  
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15 The concept of hybridity as used in organizational studies contributes to changing  
16 the level of this study: rather than studying cultures and systems, it becomes  
17 possible to concentrate on exploring whether a concept of hybridity can be used in  
18 the study of news agencies as organizations. News agencies have not hitherto been  
19 seen as hybrid organizations in terms of their ownership and governance, but it still  
20 becomes possible to argue that their ownership is mixed, even if they are not  
21 traditional third-sector organizations. They do combine the different logics of state,  
22 business and non-profit (public service) organizations through their ownership,  
23 governance and clients.  
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32 When it comes to hybrid-regime and media-system studies, we again learn the  
33 importance of interdependence and the end of 'purity' when using the concept of  
34 fixed categories. News agencies can be understood as systems even if they are not  
35 often studied in the framework of a national media system. As Boyd-Barret and  
36 Rantanen (2000, p. 87) write,  
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43 a system comprises interdependent parts, and this is what we find with news  
44 agencies: they use each other as sources, they sell to each other, they forge  
45 alliances with one another, they sell services to client media and use client media as  
46 sources of information.  
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51 When we combine the concept of a system with the study of news agencies, we can  
52 see that while the system approach very much emphasizes structures, fixed-ness  
53 and stability, but when cultural and organization studies use the concept of hybridity  
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3 they stress informality, mixed-ness and change. News agencies are trying to  
4 integrate new and old media logics inside their organizations, but their attempts to  
5 change are restricted by their own existing ownership and governance structures.  
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7 This may be one of the key issues in their attempts to overcome the crisis. As  
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9 Chadwick et al. (2016, p. 285) write,

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13 power in the hybrid media system is exercised by those who are successfully able to  
14 create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that  
15 modify, enable, or disable the agency of others, across and between a range of older  
16 and newer media settings.  
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23 One of the key issues for political scientists and media-systems scholars has been  
24 the identification of more and less democratic regimes and systems. This article has  
25 the much less ambitious aim of trying to identify components that make news  
26 agencies an arguably important but neglected element of national media systems.  
27 Even by using data that is currently available, one can conclude that all ownership  
28 and governance structures of news agencies have their strengths and weaknesses,  
29 and that there is no one ideal model that fits all. As Juntunen and Nieminen (2019, p.  
30 11) write, “mechanisms for assessing the value of national news agencies to society  
31 must be complemented by strict regulations on firewalls that effectively guarantee  
32 their autonomy from any outside interference, either political or commercial.” This is  
33 also an internal issue for news agencies: how to find and establish new forms of  
34 governance that help to make them more inclusive and diversified to be able to  
35 establish new relationships with their existing and new clients based on “mutual  
36 benefit and sustainability” (Haigh and Hoffman, 2012, p. 127), but also serve their  
37 role for society as provider of trustworthy news.  
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50 The data available to this article cannot help to answer the question of how news  
51 agencies’ news production and reporting have changed – a topic for another study. It  
52 has only used the most recent research on news agencies to argue that hybridity is  
53 a useful concept and that rather than leaving it behind we should further explore it.  
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3 At a time when news agencies are in crisis, as some of those in Europe are,  
4 academic researchers are invited to shift some of their attention from the newest  
5 media to news agencies. Even if these are often seen as ‘old media’, their continuing  
6 role in providing news to both old and new media, even while finally themselves  
7 struggling, needs further research, both conceptual and empirical.  
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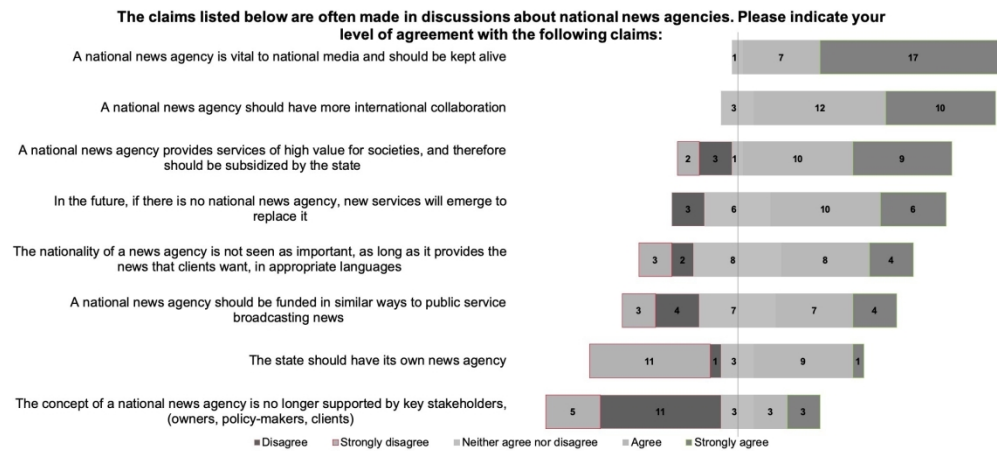


Figure 1. Attitudes of EANA Member Agencies, 2018.

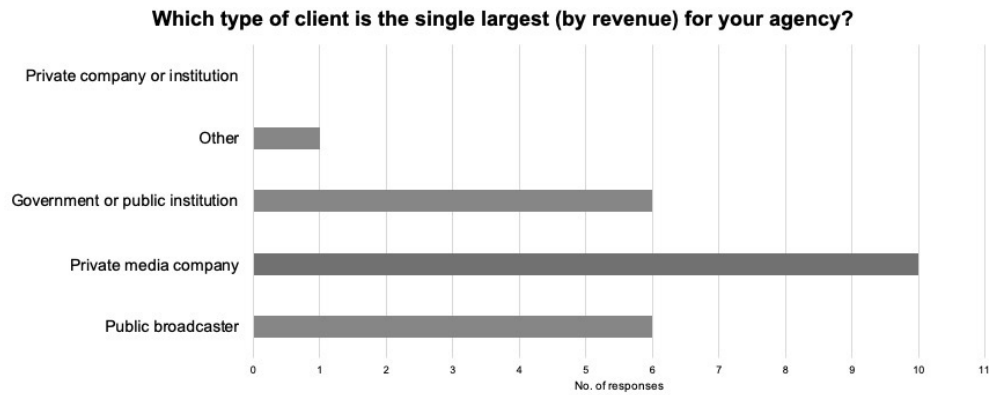
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Table 2: Ownership of EANA member agencies, 2017

Ownership Type	Full ownership	Partial Ownership
Private Media Companies	2	7
Other private (non-media) owners	1	3
Public or state-owned	0	6
Other state or government institutions or public ownership	11	1
Other	2	1

Note: Total Responses: 25. Two agencies responded with a sixth option: agency is not a company and ownership cannot be defined

Source: Bhat, 2018



20 Figure 2. Largest Clients by Revenue of EANA Member Agencies, 2017.

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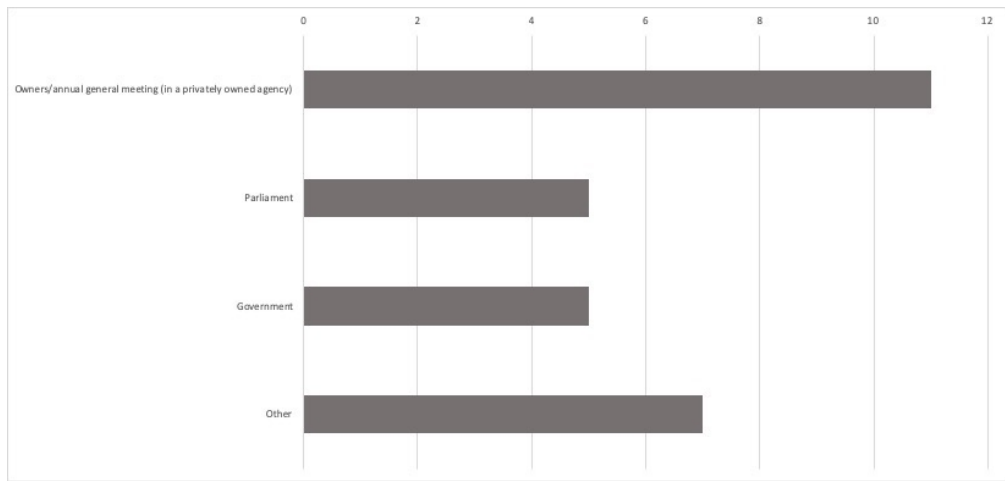


Figure 3. Who Appoints the Boards of EANA Member Agencies? (2017).  
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