

# Blurred Boundaries of Journalism: Multiple Employment in the Media Industry and the Hybridity of Occupational Work

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## Abstract

*The aim of the paper is to discuss journalistic communication as service provision in media industry work in the context of convergence and divergence. The theoretical considerations refer to the work and societal position of journalists in modern societies in general. We take a look at the link between media, work and culture and ask about the creators of the media business, especially the journalists. The empirical part of the analysis concentrates on journalistic activity within the employment system in Germany. The research was done for dependent and independent employed journalists. The results show that there is no typical pattern of a journalistic occupation and its forms of employment, where the journalistic existence is split into freelancing on the one side and staff writers on the other side. There is a diversity of forms, entities, thereby arranging ways in which creators of media do appear. As a result, we can make the point that the process of convergence has led to divergence, which can be characterised by four different aspects: a) heterogeneity and differentiation, b) casualisation of work, c) hybridisation of work, as well as d) de-standardisation and mobility. Empirical findings underline that journalism has many different faces, and currently diversity and heterogeneity seem to dominate rather than features of convergencies.*

## Introduction and problem discussion

The article deals with journalists in their occupational, social and macro-structural societal environment which can be characterised by new technologies, increasing demands for flexibilisation, new and rapidly-changing market situations and a general background of globalisation and worldwide dynamics. Journalists as the protagonists of media and its contents and creation have become increasingly important. However, it is unclear whether this process can be characterised by the term convergence or whether the process leads to

divergence. The illustrated considerations refer to the work and societal position of journalists in modern societies in general, whereas the empirical references refer exclusively to Germany, where we use a special data set, which enables us to take a closer look at how convergence actually happens. In sum, the paper reports that major actors of the media business – in our case these are journalists – are not a homogenous group regarding status and life-situations, but hide very different income zones and working realities. In contrast to rising forms of convergencies in terms of the homogenization of life-chances of people engaged in journalism, we increasingly find elements of diverse realities among that occupational category, ranging from high status and prestige positions down to positions that are close to poverty, with a need to have multiple sources of income since the main job doesn't seem to provide necessary alimentation. Although the data are restricted to the case of Germany, one may assume that the empirical findings prove to show very general portrait lines of the social and economic development of modern capitalist societies. Lines of differentiation and segmentation seem to dominate over tendencies to level out and to homogenize.

The concrete empirical phenomena of the division of industry structures and labour markets and, especially, the media industry in international comparisons are lastly dependent upon different influencing factors including firm strategies, labour markets and institutional arrangements, which differ considerably between societies. There is never one "best logic" as an *ultima ratio* of capitalist practice to organize a production process this or that way, but it is quite often dependent on coincidences, specific ideas in specific historical situations and the cultural context. Chandler's seminal books (Chandler 1962, Chandler 1990) already demonstrated the relative autonomy and convergencies of management strategies historically. Williamson 1975 transaction cost analysis does not imply that all enterprises follow the same script of strategy. If culture makes a difference (Jones 2006), capitalism does not exist in a vacuum but in a context with specific social regimes of living and producing. Trying to understand varieties of capitalism (Elsner and Hanappi 2008) is the ultimate acknowledgement that culture and institutional specifications and paths of development matter. Increasing (new) discussion about path-dependency (David 2007) wants to rediscover history.

The argumentation aims at the link between media, work and culture and looks at the creators of the media business, especially the journalists. A subject rarely extends as strikingly and sustainably into everyday-life of citizens as – *nomen est omen* – mass media and its organs do. It is remarkable, however, that reflections on the media cannot keep pace with media proliferation and its importance: In any case the sociology of mass media lags behind reality, the formidable evolution of information and communications technology, which – serving as a multiplier technology – should demand the full attention of a reality science, a social science interested in social dynamics. There is no doubt, after all, that the technically constantly changing media in their diversified, multi-functional forms of application invade nearly all areas of everyday-life (Müller-Doohm and Neumann-Braun 1999: 9). The illustrated considerations refer to the work of journalists in the production of and by media (for the terminological diffusion of the term media see Burkart 1999, Jaren and Donges 2011, chap. 4) and its location in the division of occupations.

From our point of view, the position in the occupational and societal composition seems to be a reflection of societal forces, distributions and their changes. General processes of social changes and differentiation can be found, which make the landscape of occupations and related social positions more fragile through a series of disruptions. Consequently, it seems that there is no longer only one existing standard norm, but increasingly heterogeneous characteristics and variations of winners and losers have emerged. These individual developments are overlapped by general processes of globalisation and by a trend towards a fundamental rise in services and a secular change towards an information society. In the end, the process of convergence actually leads to divergence.

## Literature Review

### *Professions, independent professionals, services*

The topic of independent professionals and their positioning in the development of the 21st century is situated at the intersection of important application areas, which currently rank very highly in economic discussion. These topics include the development of the service society (Bögenhold 1996), topics related to the increasingly important role of knowledge and information in economy and society (Winter 2011) and finally the discussion about questions of globalisation and its effects on the transformation of the working world (Mayer et al. 2011). This interplay of single components of development in combination with the increasing information-orientation is deemed to be the trend that will progressively and substantially shape the economic and working world of the 21st century.

The unstoppable and irreversible shift of the occupational composition towards a service economy is rooted in the enormous progress of productivity, which has taken place over the past centuries in all developed economies. If we examine the development of the service society more closely, we can discern how the contents of individual occupations also constantly change: As can be seen by the contents, with which employees fill their occupational activities, increasingly fewer people are engaged in the manufacturing activities in the original manual-productive sense, whereas more and more people have become engaged in the so called tertiary, quaternary and quinary work contents (Bell 1985), including working functions such as trading, planning and researching, managing, teaching and informing, nursing, treating or communicating.

Directly related to this general trend is the constantly increasing specialized knowledge of employment, a term that dates from Weber 1922 and which has been replaced today by wordings such as 'knowledge societies' (Stehr 2005a). The emergence of such 'knowledge societies' can be demonstrated by various examples: In the 1970s the number of employees exceeded the number of workers for the first time in Germany. During the 1980s the portion of students surmounted the number of apprentices for the first time in history. By looking over the decades we can see a creeping revolution in the sense of a fundamental change of the social and occupational composition, to which the technological developments in economic life including the information and communication technologies and the resulting demands as well as the constantly increasing role of expertise (Stehr and Grundmann 2011) have contributed.<sup>1</sup> The occupational category, which was coined by Max Weber as the 'poor Intelligentsia and with specialised knowledge' (Weber 1972: 279) is well on the way to becoming the majority core of society in the 21st century (Haller 2008). This is shown *inter alia* by the rapidly increasing rates of graduates of universities and polytechnics in the employment system in a comparison of nearly all socio-economically developed societies (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993).

Embedded in this trend is the general development of freelance occupations (see table 1). It is not only an indicator of this trend, but it also codetermines its development: The more labour markets are becoming knowledge- and service-formed, the more work by freelancers increases. Overlaying this development is the considerable increase of occupational self-employment and a trend towards 'entrepreneurial economies' (Audretsch 2007, Bonnet et al. 2010, Dana 2011, Bonnet et al. 2012). The more self-employed persons are residing in the independent professions, the more the independent professions become a carrier of the boom of new forms of self-employment and new job profiles in the employee-sector. New job profiles in combination with new technological possibilities ensure that there are constantly new opportunities for freelancers. The independent professions are a subject of these services.

<sup>1</sup> With the increase of knowledge Stehr diagnoses and refers to an increasing fragility of society; a creeping process, triggered by an increase of knowledge in society. According to Stehr, the term knowledge becomes a content free 'black box' and is not clearly defined anymore. Knowledge takes on different shapes and figurations that are limited in their ways: It takes knowledge about knowledge to be able to survive in these new information societies. According to him, the concept of knowledge in the public discussion is very much shaped by the scientific definition: 'the success of the scientific community in installing a particular conception of knowledge as the dominant public concept of knowledge'; (Stehr 2005b: 303).

Table 1: Change of the number of self-employed persons in the independent professions from 1991 to 2009 (in percent)

Independent professions	1991 to 2009
Civil engineers, architects and the like	29.4
Auditors, tax consultants	31.8
Legal representatives, solicitors	82.3
Physicians	56.5
Dentists	48.2
Veterinary surgeons	5.5
Pharmacists	-2.6
Independent professions in total	42,4
Self-employed people in total	36,7

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the scientific use files of the Microcensus of the Federal Statistical Office Germany

It is a characteristic profile of the independent professions that nearly all of them are based on academic programmes of study and they can, therefore, be seen as a prototype of an expert knowledge which has been addressed in the social-scientific professionalisation discussion of Anglo-American shaping since the 1930s (e.g. Parsons 1939). In the course of the secular growth of the academisation of professional qualifications we can see that the number of independent professions has experienced a great increase during the last decades. “It seems evident that many of the most important features of our society are to a considerable extent dependent on the smooth functioning of the professions” (Parsons 1939: 457) which are labelled elsewhere as “the intellectual disciplines” (Parsons 1968: 536).

In other words, the academically shaped occupations of expertise, to which the journalist directly belongs, is a pillar of self-employment within the group of service providers as well as – in the case of an existence as employee – that of academic employees within the group of salary or wage dependent occupations.

### ***Fragmentations and heterogeneities: Different faces of labour market developments***

The described development towards specialised knowledge professions is a jigsaw-puzzle in a concept of labour markets in transition (Schmid 2000), that goes hand in hand with the key words of flexibilisation, globalisation and new challenges for continued education and further education (Allen and van der Velden 2011). The more involved such professions become in global dynamics, the more the need for a differentiation between these categories appears, because losers and winners arise simultaneously (Støren and Arnsen 2011). Due to this, conflicting developments and – especially – completely different professional careers occur. On the one hand, there are employed persons with above-average incomes and on the other hand persons with problematic, instable and comparatively low incomes exist. In view of the last-mentioned developments, four different trends can be discerned:

#### 1. Heterogeneity and differentiation

There are various types of journalism as occupation. The two major divisions are the self-employed occupations and wage or salary dependent occupations. Certainly, it has to be kept in mind that connecting lines of overlapping identities exist. Heterogeneities in the existence of freelance journalists can be theoretically stated and empirically found within self-employment (at great length in Meyen et al. 2008). The same goes for journalists in wage and salary dependent employment.

In Germany the number of self-employed persons has been rising again during the last fifteen years after a persistent decline over many decades. A differentiation of the self-employed workers reveals that the number of micro entrepreneurs (solo-self-employed persons without further employees in their eco-

conomic business ventures) has been greatly increasing and that this development is likely to continue (Bögenhold and Fachinger 2010, Bögenhold and Fachinger 2011). The category of journalists is a component of this scenario and reflects these developments. Within the category of self-employed journalists primarily micro-firms exist that are depicted as 'free employees' one-person-firms, which in single cases can succeed financially. However, in the majority of cases they are often faced with difficult situations in their existence, which implies different strategies to successfully manage their existences (Meyen et al. 2008, Buckow 2011, particularly chapter 4).

A similar tendency, such as was described by Emil Lederer 100 years ago for the labour market category of employees in general, is shown by the group of dependently-employed journalists (Weischenberg et al. 2006): Concealed behind the collective term of employees is, as Lederer argued, such a social and technical variety of activities and functions, that are infinitely differentiated in horizontal and vertical direction, that by this the forming of a unified term for employees has provoked difficulties. Lederer adds that the vertical differentiations among white collar workers are even more diverse than those between blue collar workers or even within the global work force (Lederer 1912: 22).

In addition to the increase of heterogeneity and differentiation there are further striking characteristics, that today concern the area of gainful occupation in general and that of journalists particularly:

## 2. Casualisation of work

The term casualisation of work refers to the circumstance that incomes from gainful occupation are close to poverty (Kraemer 2008). It has to be taken into consideration that the wage dispersion is considerable, namely from micro incomes to significantly above-average incomes. It can be assumed that a considerable proportion of the continuously emerging new revival of self-employment belongs to the circle of those that result in insolvencies. Some of these self-employed labourers are directly to be linked with the phenomenon of the Working Poor, so that the question *inter alia* arises, to what extent this form of self-employment exhibits analogue forms of a modern day labourer.

## 3. Hybridisation of work

At this moment it is not clear, how and to what extent a new line of segmentation in the labour force will open up and to what extent new forms of casualisation due to below-average incomes and instable social positions in short-term contracts as well as risky market positions will arise. In combination with the social heterogeneity there will furthermore be forms of hybridisation of work, also in the face of problems with low incomes.

## 4. De-standardisation and mobility

An increase in the unsteadiness of employment with frequent changes between wage and salary dependent employment and self-employment as well as changes between unemployment continues to be striking. At this point, new patterns of careers develop which contain a measure of uncertainty combined with a partially high material risk. Parallel to this, a high degree of de-standardisation within the category is visible. Concerning this there are significant differences in view of social positions, like they are illustrated *inter alia* by economic activities. These can be seen in the heterogeneity of weekly working-times. Many workingtimes range around more than forty hours per week, while others are considerably shorter. The different moments of de-standardisation show a considerable form of diversity in this labour market category.

With a view to this scenario it seems of great interest to look into the question of why parameters of journalistic occupation differ between employed and self-employed work and how similar they are, respectively. Another important aspect is the question concerning differentiations in income, workingtime, multiple employment and mobility (for Austria see e.g. Hummel and Kirchhoff 2010 and in detail Kaltenbrunner et al. 2008).

## Methodology and Approach

The aim of our analysis is to show the trend of digitalized media convergence effects trends in the structure and organization of the profession of journalism. Therefore we use a descriptive approach for our analysis. As such structural changes take place over a long time period and because the development is a protracted process and reactions of people and firms take time, data are needed which cover a broad timeframe. Furthermore, a large sample is needed to differentiate the heterogeneous group of journalists into subgroups, e.g. by gender, employment status, income sources, working time, to obtain further indications and specifications of the changes within the field of journalists work.

Therefore our analysis is based upon the German Microcensus from the Statistical Office Germany which is available for the period 1991 to 2009. The Microcensus is a representative survey covering 1% of the population of Germany. It is a household panel with detailed information about household composition and employment of household members offering information "... in a detailed subject related and regional breakdown on the population structure, the economic and social situation of the population, families, consensual unions and households, on employment, job search, education/training and continuing education/training, the housing situation and health" (Körner and Puch 2011: 26). The data were recorded using the method of Computer Aided Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method (for a more detailed description see <http://www.gesis.org/en/services/data/official-microdata/microcensus/>; [accessed 06/09/2013]).

However, there are some problems concerning the validity and reliability of the data. Most of the data were self-reported. The statistics rely on respondents for (subjective) evaluations of their own situation. For example, this could be a major problem for the information about income or working hour. Therefore, the results of the empirical analysis based on information of the Microcensus should be interpreted with great caution. However, no satisfactory information concerning journalists work in such detail is available elsewhere.

All in all, the Microcensus offers some insight into the situation of journalists and is used as a differentiated sample for analyzing trends in the structure and organization of the profession of journalism in the absence of more specific information.

## Viewpoint on Convergence: Journalists – horizontal and vertical lines of differentiation

In view of work place, client or employer, work content and respective conditions, no precise definition of media originating work exists. After all, with the diffusion of information and communication technology, the spectrum of new products increases but also new enterprises arise, especially many firms in the field of software and IT services, which enable journalistic work in new forms. They also provide conditions for international communication and outsourcing. In the end those developments are embedded in the process of the reconfiguration of industrial relations: "Work is intimately related to other social, economic, and political issues, and so the growth of precarious work and insecurity has wide-spread effects on both work-related and non-work phenomena"; (Kalleberg 2009: 8).

As can be seen in **Error! Reference source not found.**, the relationship between employed and self-employed journalists changed over the period between 1991 and 2008. Self-employment has become more important: Nearly one third of all journalists are self-employed in 2008 – interestingly without major differences between women and men. Sure enough there are – statistically speaking – only self-employed journalists within the category of the so called solo self-employed journalists.

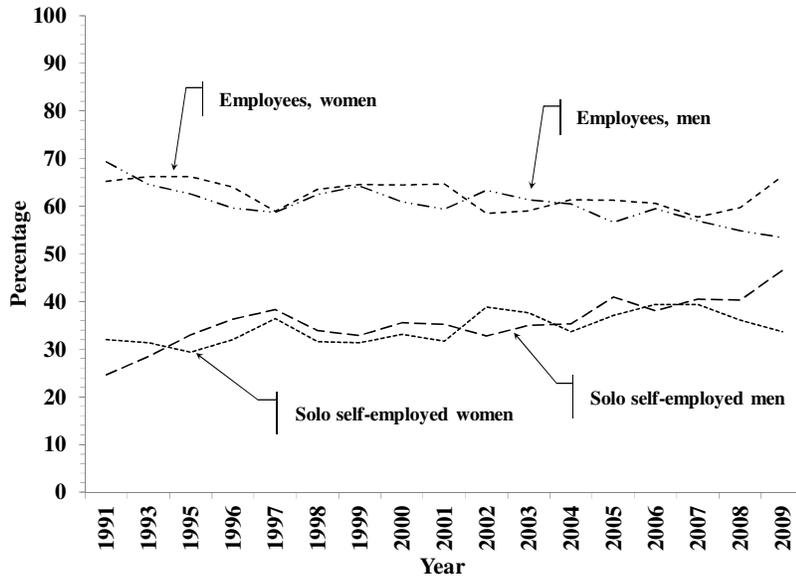


Figure 1: Employed and self-employed journalists in Germany, 1991 to 2009 (in per cent) (own calculations on the basis of the scientific use files of the Microcensus of the Federal Statistical Office Germany)

Furthermore, the financial situation of journalists is of great interest. From a social and economic point of view the income distribution is especially important. Two different aspects are worth mentioning here: The monthly (net) income of journalists is distributed over a wide range of classes. They vary from marginal or minimal incomes to vastly above average net incomes. There is a significant disproportionality between the income of self-employed and that of the employed journalists.

The incomes of the solo self-employed are much more frequently located in lower income classes (see also Meyen et al. 2008: 6). Still, there are some self-employed persons with high or even very high incomes, but compared to the employed journalists there are many more self-employed persons with low and very low incomes. Almost one third of all solo self-employed journalists earn less than 1,100 € whereas only twelve per cent of the employed journalists are located in this category. Conversely, in the upper classes of the income distribution employed journalists are more strongly represented.

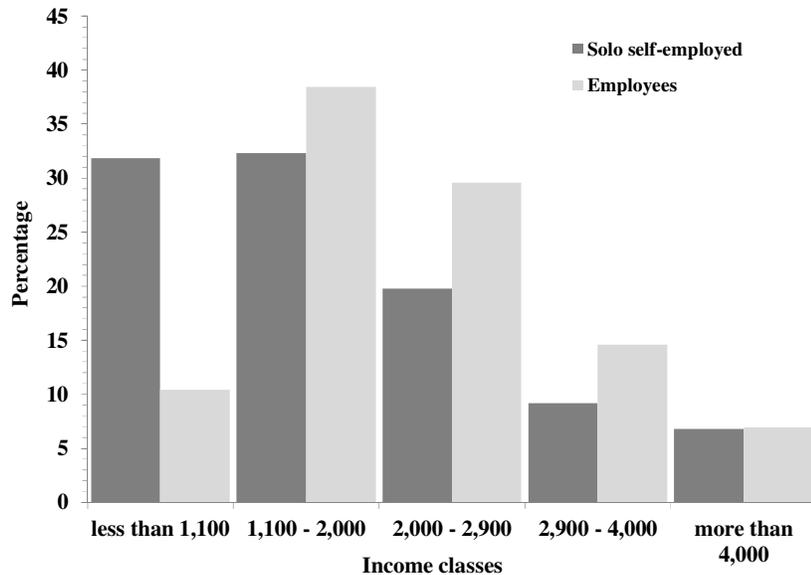


Figure 2: Individual net income per month of journalists in Germany 2009 (in per cent) (own calculations on the basis of the scientific use files of the Microcensus of the Federal Statistical Office Germany)

In view of the high heterogeneity of income and the fact that almost one third of self-employed journalists earn less than 1,100 € per month, the question arises whether this is the only income source or whether additional income streams exist. The data show that several forms of hybridity of media work can be noted with only minor differences between women and men: 22.9 per cent of all self-employed journalists have one (or two) supplementary income sources.<sup>2</sup> Compared with that, only 14.6 per cent of employed journalists have income from other resources. Those data indicate the hybridisation of forms of work. According to the category of employment every sixth or tenth journalist relies on at least one additional income source.

<sup>2</sup>Meyen et al. 2008: 6, point out that as much as 44.5 per cent of self-employed journalists make a living not only from media work; see for this also Buckow 2011: 56 pp.

Table 2: Additional income sources in Germany 2009 (in per cent)

	No other come source	in- 1 payment/ assistance	2 payments/ assistances	3 payments/ assistances	n. a.	Total
<b>Men</b>						
Solo self-employed	77.1	20.0	2.9	0.0	0.0	100
Self-employed with employees	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
Employee	85.4	12.2	2.4	0.0	0.0	100
Total	81.5	16.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	100
<b>Women</b>						
Solo self-employed	87.4	12.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
Self-employed with employees	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
Employee	87.8	12.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
Total	88.2	11.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
<b>All</b>						
Solo self-employed	81.4	16.9	1.7	0.0	0.0	100
Self-employed with employees	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
Employee	86.7	12.2	1.1	0.0	0.0	100
Total	84.7	14.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	100

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the scientific use files of the Microcensus of the Federal Statistical Office Germany.

Beside the theoretically and empirically important fact of precarisation and hybridisation of journalists, a third aspect lies in the question about social de-standardisation and mobility. We can find not only strong heterogeneity with respect to weekly working hours (see Table 3) but also regarding the duration in the field of media work. 16 per cent of all self-employed journalist work less than 15 hours per week – which fits the definition of part time work. In contrast to this, only 2.58 per cent of the employed journalists work less than 15 hours per week. The working time intervals of the self-employed are more evenly distributed over the work time categories. Just about 61 per cent of the employed journalists work between 31 and 45 hours per week. By contrast, only 34 per cent of the self-employed fall into this category.

There are also major disparities between the working hours of women and men. Especially in the lower categories female journalists are to a large degree over-represented. Whoever discusses the situation of journalists in general should keep in mind that there are different work and social realities behind journalistic occupations (Meyen et al. 2008: 11)

Table 3: Weekly working hours of journalists in Germany 2009 (in per cent)

	Overall		Women		Men	
	Solo self-employed	Em- ployee	Solo self-employed	Em- ployee	Solo self-employed	Em- ployee
1 - 15 hours	16.00	2.58	22.22	5.00	12.50	0.00
16 - 30 hours	20.00	13.89	27.78	20.00	15.63	6.25
31 - 45 hours	34.00	61.11	27.78	57.50	37.50	65.63
more than 45 hours	30.00	22.22	22.22	17.50	34.38	28.13
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the scientific use files of the Microcensus of the Federal Statistical Office Germany.

## Conclusions

Summarising the results of the analysis regarding the occupations of journalists within the employment system we can constitute that journalists' work is done as wage- or salary-dependent employee, as well as in self-employment. In the latter case, self-employment is to be seen as working as a freelancer, and we have established that journalists only work in solo self-employment. The gap between the number of employed journalists and those working as freelancers is gradually closing. It seems as if freelancers are on the rise but it is also interesting that no gender effect is visible in this respect. However, it was not possible to distinguish between the different working places of journalists, who, to some extent, work in very heterogeneous media (Henninger and Gottschall 2007, Weischenberg et al. 2006). Beside those shortcomings, the analysis reveals a very diverse income situation for journalists. There are a few who earn very high incomes, while others exist with more or less marginal income from their occupation. Accordingly, it is by no way astonishing that between ten and twenty per cent of journalists have a second or even third job.

One can assume that in the course of more frequented new ways of social mobility new forms of occupational and biographical unsteadiness will arise. It is hard to identify the degree to which this is a free decision and individually desired, or whether it is forced against the background of a lack of alternatives. Overall it has to be stated for the record that the process of media convergence has led to divergence on the microlevel. Not trends of convergencies in terms of the homogenization of life-chances of people being engaged in journalism can be seen in the case of Germany, but we increasingly find elements of diverse realities within the occupational category, ranging from high status and prestige positions down to positions that are close to poverty with a need to have multiple sources of income, since the main job doesn't seem to provide necessary alimentation. Although the data are restricted to the case of Germany, one may assume that the empirical findings prove to show very general portrait lines of the social and economic development of modern capitalist societies.

The result of research on occupational transitions in association with the question about specific age cohorts and particular patterns of social mobility points to multi-episodic processes of occupational careers (Blossfeld 1987). There is neither the one and only occupation for a lifetime, nor does a typical pattern of

media work exist. The analysis shows how media work is divided into freelance activities on the one side and in work as an employee on the other side. What seems to be constitutive for the labour market is a considerable increase in flexibility, unsteadiness and social risks (Keller and Seifert 2007, Seifert and Struck 2009, Fachinger and Frankus 2011), and that can also be assigned to the field of journalistic activities. There exists diversity in forms, existence, and thereby mediated ways of living, which is often concealed for those who consume media as well as media contents.

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