

# Diverging worlds of foreign correspondence: The changing working conditions of correspondents in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland

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## Abstract

Foreign correspondents seem to have become an endangered species. They are said to be increasingly substituted by new forms of foreign correspondence. These claims are often raised by researchers studying foreign correspondence to and from the United States and the United Kingdom. We test whether assumptions about the demise and substitution of the traditional foreign correspondent also apply beyond these contexts. Particularly, the study seeks to explore the differences in the working conditions of various kinds of foreign correspondents. Based on 211 responses gathered through an online survey of a carefully reconstructed population of 721 journalists, it describes the profile and working conditions of foreign correspondents in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. It finds that the traditional correspondent – a professional journalist working full-time for legacy media – may be more resistant to change than expected. In the perception of correspondents, there is not much substitution through parachutes, locals, amateurs, or reporting from the headquarters. Working conditions are not worsening for everyone. Rather, we find diverging worlds of foreign correspondence depending on the media type, the country of origin, and the kind of job contract journalists have.

## Keywords

Austria, foreign correspondents, foreign news, Germany, international communication, journalism, Switzerland, working conditions, freelancer

## Introduction

One of the paradoxes of today's media cultures is the co-existence of increasing transnational interdependence in the political, economic, and cultural realm and stable or even growing levels of parochialism in the coverage of many media outlets: in Europe, foreign coverage is found to be stagnating while it is shrinking in US media (Cohen, 2013; Wessler et al., 2008; Willnat and Martin, 2012). Media content, often, does not mirror global interdependencies but national myths of sovereignty (Hafez, 2011). The lack of foreign coverage is not so problematic in terms of access to information from other countries. In the wider digital media environment, more information than ever before is available. The very abundance of information, however, increases the need for making sense of this information. Therefore, foreign correspondents as professionals who 'manage meaning' across borders (Hannerz, 2004: 3) are needed more than ever (Archetti, 2012). The more globalized the world gets, the more relevant becomes foreign coverage to people's everyday lives (Dyer, 2014).

In times of an increased need for 'cosmopolitan coverage' (Brüggemann and Kleinen-v. Königlöw, 2013) and 'mediated cosmopolitanism' (Robertson, 2010), it is worrisome that foreign correspondents seem to have become an 'endangered species' (Willnat and Martin, 2012: 495) and that they struggle with deteriorating working conditions (Hamilton, 2009; Hamilton and Jenner, 2004).

That being said, empirical evidence for the decline of the traditional foreign correspondent mostly stems from the American and British contexts. The question of whether new forms such as parachute journalism and the use of amateur reporters actually play a role equivalent to that of traditional foreign correspondents still needs to be put to test empirically. Our study therefore tests both notions: the one about the decline of the traditional foreign correspondence and the notion of the traditional correspondents' substitution through new forms of correspondence. Going beyond studying foreign correspondence from and in the United States, the study focuses on foreign correspondence in the German-speaking countries (Austria, Switzerland,<sup>1</sup> Germany).

Based on responses from 211 foreign correspondents gathered through an online survey of a total survey population of 721 cases, this study reconstructs the journalists' assessments of their working conditions. The study addresses three research questions:

- RQ1. Who are the foreign correspondents in the German-speaking part of Europe?
- RQ2. What are the working conditions of foreign correspondents and how are they changing?
- RQ3. Which factors explain differences in the changing working conditions of correspondents?

The study looks at changes from the perspective of the foreign correspondents: Which trends apply to their personal working environment? Thereby, the study taps into the expert knowledge of correspondents, but their views are of course also subjective accounts of reality that need to be validated by studies drawing on other sources of data. It turns out that not all correspondents are the same. Instead, this study finds evidence for diverging worlds of foreign correspondence depending on the respective professional context.

### *Prior research on trends in foreign correspondence*

Research on foreign correspondents in and from the United States has the longest tradition (for early studies, see Maxwell, 1956; Wilhelm, 1963) and still is in the focus of many studies (e.g. Willnat and Weaver, 2003; for an overview, see Self, 2011 and Gross, 2011). Until the 1990s, research on foreign correspondence mainly consisted of standardized surveys of correspondents from and in the United States and United Kingdom. Many studies have followed this template and conducted standardized surveys looking into the socio-demographic backgrounds and professional roles of foreign correspondents (Hess, 2005; Junghanns and Hanitzsch, 2006; for an overview, see Hahn and Lönnendonker, 2009). More recently, research has taken into account a greater diversity of countries and is complemented by qualitative and ethnographic approaches (Archetti, 2013; Hannerz, 2004; Hess, 1996; Merle, 2013).

In order to study foreign correspondents, a working definition for the object of study is necessary. Most research on foreign correspondents defines this group, pragmatically, as those individuals who were registered as such (Willnat and Martin, 2012). According to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the International Right of Correction, a correspondent is an individual employed by a media organization who is regularly engaged in the collection and the reporting of news material and who, when abroad, is identified as a correspondent by a valid passport or by a similar document (Convention on the International Right of Correction, 435 U.N.T.S. 191).

Beyond these formal definitions, foreign correspondents may also be identified by their institutional context and their daily professional practice. Then, foreign correspondents are persons employed by a news organization who make their living by journalistic reporting to an audience in another country. Yet, both the formal and the institutional definitions only cover the core of foreign correspondence. As Hannerz (2004) points out, 'in the real world of international news reporting, the edges of the category get a bit blurred, through variations in recruitment, geographical mobility, and audience definitions' (p. 5).

This leads us to the trends in foreign correspondence as identified by prior studies: the first trend is the *decline* of the traditional foreign correspondence. This trend is documented for US foreign correspondence (Enda, 2011; Hahn and Lönnendonker, 2009; Kumar, 2011). Hamilton and Jenner (2004) claim that the traditional professional full-time foreign correspondent is 'a yardstick that no longer measures well' (p. 315). The foreign correspondent understood as a well-paid, full-time professional working for one media outlet abroad is expected to survive only as a niche phenomenon that few media outlets are willing to afford. Foreign correspondence may nevertheless thrive based upon a more diverse set of sources such as parachute journalists, amateur journalists, freelancers, and coverage generated at the foreign news desk back home (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004). Thus, *substitution* of the traditional correspondent through new types of communicators and thus the *diversification* of foreign correspondence are two other major trends that can be derived from the existing literature on the subject. We should thus explore the various worlds of foreign correspondence that are characterized by vastly differing working conditions.

In this study, we follow the traditional formal and institutional approach to define the population of foreign correspondents. This way we will be able to test to what degree the traditional correspondent is actually

disappearing in the countries under analysis. At the same time, we will follow Hamilton and Jenner (2004) in the formulation of questions concerning novel trends in foreign correspondence, thus trying to cover both the core and the margins of foreign correspondence. More than a decade after Hamilton and Jenner's groundbreaking article, it is time to put their assessments of trends in foreign correspondence to an empirical test: Do the traditional correspondents actually experience the kind of trends that the academic literature has identified?

The changing working conditions of foreign correspondents are driven by a dramatic transformation of the economics and technology of news production. Tunstall noted, as early as 1971, that the deployment of foreign correspondents was not primarily related to revenue goals. The high costs incurred by placing resident reporters abroad stands in no healthy relation to the commercial value of their output, but they contribute to the reputation of a newspaper or TV station. The increasing commercialization and corporate ownership structures of newspapers shift the focus from investments in foreign correspondents more toward short-term profits. Due to the difficult and costly production process for high-quality TV images from remote places, stations worldwide have increasingly been relying on international TV news agencies since the Gulf War in 1991 (Baker, 2004). Furthermore, technological innovations have changed the nature of international news flows (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004): the Internet allows audiences to access information from sources around the world and to create their own tailor-made global news compilation, free of charge. Also, advertising revenues of newspapers as the biggest employers of foreign correspondents have drastically declined. All these developments have contributed to the view that traditional foreign correspondence is a profession in decline.

Two recent studies on correspondents in Europe provide further valuable insights into current trends in foreign correspondence. Archetti (2013) interviewed foreign correspondents in London and showed that besides the journalistic veterans, a new generation of foreign correspondents is emerging: younger, less experienced, partly home working, and isolated – a 'one man band' having no or less access to their news organization (p. 424). The longitudinal study of Merle (2013) outlines a radical change in professional types of foreign correspondents in Paris. In 2010, more freelancer and editorial assistants than seasoned journalists with experience were working as foreign correspondents compared to 1998. Asked about the future of their profession, foreign correspondents see a 'broader field of subjects', the 'ability to connect them with the readers', and additional 'fact-checking opportunities' as positive impacts on their job. The 'speed of publication', the 'lack of sourcing', '24/7 news production', and 'the never-ending news cycle', on the other hand, far outweigh such positive assertions. Merle (2013) sees a former elite being replaced by a new cohort of reporters who suffer from their US headquarters' waning interest in Paris as a place of relevant news making.

Foreign correspondents in different places may obviously experience vastly different working conditions but even 'the foreign correspondents in ...' should not be treated as a homogeneous group. Different professional contexts are likely to put foreign correspondents into very different situations. In order to locate relevant contexts that determine the shape of different worlds of foreign correspondence, we will resort to levels-of-influence models (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Reese, 2001; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) in order to understand variation in foreign correspondence. These models situate influences on journalism at the individual, the organizational, the professional, and the wider political and cultural levels.

This study explores relevant explanatory factors on three levels: first, on the level of the individual correspondent it explores whether the distinction between being a freelancer and employee explains variance in correspondents' working conditions. Second, on the organizational level it explores the extent to which different media types (newspaper, news agency, etc.) matter. Here, we might see some substantial differences between newspapers and other media outlets. While newspapers experience a dramatic crisis in many Western countries, some of the highly specialized services of transnational news agencies like Reuters and Bloomberg are likely to offer better working conditions due to higher revenues. Third, both the host country (Austria, Germany, or Switzerland) and the home country (where the headquarters of the respective journalists are situated) may determine journalistic working conditions. The home country may matter as the economic situation of the national media organizations is likely to influence the situation of their foreign correspondents.

## Method

In selecting Germany, Austria, and Switzerland as cases, the study followed a most-similar systems sampling logic while still providing some variation that makes a comparison meaningful: while all three countries are culturally connected by a common language and culture, they are distinct with regard to their geopolitical relevance. Germany as the most populous European country, and the fourth-largest economy in the world, stands in strong contrast to the much smaller nations of Austria and Switzerland. These two countries also differ in their international role: both are hosting various international organizations, but Switzerland – thanks to its many global companies and to the seat of several UN organizations in Geneva – has stronger international ties than Austria, thus potentially attracting more foreign correspondents. The main purpose of this study, however, is not to compare

the three countries but to extend our vision of foreign correspondence beyond the case of correspondents in and from the United States. As correspondents are likely to cover more than one country, it makes sense to analyze correspondents from the three countries together, as a substantial proportion is likely to also cover the neighboring country from the same language region.

There are two challenges for this kind of study: first, as there is neither a clear definition nor a comprehensive list of all foreign correspondents for the countries under analysis, the target population to be covered by the study was unknown and could only be approximated. Second, surveys depend on the journalists' willingness to respond to the questionnaire, which is increasingly becoming an issue (e.g. the response rate for a survey among US foreign correspondents, based on a mailed paper questionnaire was 17% in a study by Willnat and Weaver, 2003).

Depending on the availability of lists of foreign correspondents, we constructed the survey population based on a careful comparison of different data sources available (see Table 1). Based on a definition of foreign correspondents as (a) *journalists* (b) *situated abroad (host country)* and (c) *reporting for media outlets and audiences at home (home country)*, we omitted people who did not fit these three criteria. We excluded people working in Public Relations, journalists who turned out not to work for foreign but for domestic media, and those who were no longer working as foreign correspondents. We retained freelancers and part-time journalists who might also work in fields other than journalism during the rest of their time, as this group might have gained importance in times of shrinking budgets for permanently employed, full-time journalists. This way, the study tried to cover the diversity among foreign correspondents while preserving the basic idea of foreign correspondence: that there is a journalist reporting from abroad for her or his home audience. Another pre-condition for being included in the survey sample was rather technical: journalists needed to have an e-mail address.

In order to maximize the response rate, we designed the questionnaire both in English and in German, kept it as simple and short as possible, and pre-tested it with journalists in Austria and Switzerland. The survey was carried out between October 2012 and February 2013. We sent out two reminders via e-mail in addition to approaching journalists via telephone, if their numbers were available. For all three countries, we addressed 721 journalists, receiving responses from 211 journalists (response rate: 29%). The response rate for Switzerland was highest with 32 percent as compared to 30 percent in Austria and 27 percent in Germany (see Table 1). While these response rates are satisfactory compared to the turn-out of other surveys of journalists, they still raise the question of whether the sample accurately represents the population of correspondents.

The true number of correspondents in the three countries was unknown, but our survey population (N = 721) represents a solid approximation, as it was carefully constructed drawing on a variety of data sources. Still, this survey might have missed out on some parachute correspondents who cover the three countries only on an occasional basis and are therefore not accredited with the institutions where most permanent correspondents gather in order to receive their press cards. Among the journalists who were not covered, at least for Austria and Switzerland, there were probably a number of travel journalists who write occasional stories on skiing in the Alps. Also, we might have neglected people who did not regularly work as correspondents but who occasionally write articles for foreign media on a freelance basis. While some people on the margins of what can be defined as foreign correspondence may thus have been ignored, it is still safe to say that with our survey population we cover *the core* of the group of foreign correspondents. In order to test the degree to which the sample of journalists who have responded is actually representative of the survey population, Table 2 compares both data sets with regard to all variables where data were available for both sets: gender, home country, and media type. The comparison shows that our sample represents the survey population fairly well. Yet, there are a number of smaller misrepresentations: for example, the high number of Spanish respondents and the comparatively larger number of correspondents working for public television. Therefore, in the following, we will resort to the survey population rather than the sample of respondents for all matters where data are available.

**Table 1.** Survey population and response rates.

	Germany	Switzerland	Austria	Total
Sources	Member list of the VAP (FCS' Association in Germany)	Foreign media outlets registered with the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs  Journalists accredited with the UN Media Center, Geneva Members of APES (Foreign Press Association), Zurich	Members of the Foreign Press Association  Members of the Press Club Concordia	
Survey population	427	189	105	721
Sample	119	60	32	211

Response rate	27%	32%	30%	29%
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VAP: Verein der Ausländischen Presse in Deutschland e.V.; FC: foreign correspondent; UN: United Nations; APES: Association de la Presse Etrangère en Suisse et au Lichtenstein.

**Table 2.** The profile of foreign correspondents (FCs) in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria (percent).

		Representativeness		Germany	Switzerland	Austria
		Population	Sample	Population		
Gender	<i>N</i>	721	202	427	189	105
%	Male	62.6	63	63.7	63.5	56.2
	Female	37.4	37	36.3	36.5	43.8
Host countries	<i>N</i>	721	211	427	189	105
%	Germany	59.2	56.4	<i>FCs per 1 million inhabitants</i>		
	Switzerland	26.2	28.4	5	23	13
	Austria	14.6	15.2			
Home countries	<i>N</i>	678	209	406	177	95
%	Japan	8.6	5.7	8.6	9	7.4
	USA	6.6	5.3	8.1	4.5	4.2
	Germany	6	6.2	0	9	26.3
	Italy	5.2	3.8	6.4	4.5	1.1
	China	4.4	4.8	3.7	6.8	3.2
	France	4.3	6.7	5.2	4.5	0
	Spain	4.1	7.2	3.9	2.3	8.4
	UK	4.1	2.4	5.2	2.3	3.2
	Russia	3.4	3.8	3.7	1.7	5.3
	Other countries	53.3	54.1	55.2	55.4	40.9
	Transn. news agency <sup>a</sup>	14.7	15.8	13.3	21.5	8.4
Media types	<i>N</i>	644	192	376	174	94
%	Daily paper	31.2	28.6	33	29.9	26.6
	Public TV/Radio	16	22.4	17	10.9	21.3
	Transn. news agency <sup>a</sup>	15.5	17.2	14.4	21.8	8.5
	National news agency	14.1	14.1	12	18.4	14.9
	Private TV/Radio	10.7	5.2	13	7.5	7.4
	Other print outlets	7.3	6.2	5.1	7.5	16
	Online	3.4	3.3	3.5	2.9	4.3
	Other media	1.8	3	2	1.1	1

Population (N = 721): target population as reconstructed from different lists of FCs for this study.

Sample (N = 211): number of journalists who have returned the questionnaire.

<sup>a</sup>Transnational news agencies: Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France Press, and Bloomberg.

The questionnaire covered basic demographics and characteristics of foreign correspondents as well as their working conditions and perceived trends in foreign correspondence. Following Reich and Hanitzsch (2013), who studied these factors in the context of journalistic autonomy, we included both ‘objective’ working conditions (such as being a freelancer or having a certain net income) and subjective perceptions relating to the correspondents’ work (such as the perception of a general deterioration of working conditions).

## Findings

### *The socio-demographic and cultural background of foreign correspondents*

The first research question asked for a mapping of correspondents in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. In the following, we will present data from the survey population (N = 721) for numbers of correspondents, gender, media type, and country of origin. For all other variables, we will rely on the sample of those correspondents who have responded to our survey questionnaire (N = 211).

We identified 427 foreign correspondents in Germany, 189 in Switzerland, and 105 in Austria who fitted our criteria. It is rather unsurprising that Germany features more foreign correspondents in total, but relative to population figures, a different picture emerges: per 1 million inhabitants, there are 5 correspondents in Germany, 13 in Austria, and 23 in Switzerland. From this perspective, the smaller countries receive considerable attention from media organizations.

Looking at the personal backgrounds, it turned out that more than 60 percent of the correspondents in the survey population (N = 721) were male, the percentage being roughly the same in all three countries studied (see Table

2). This finding confirms previous evidence pointing to a stable majority of men among foreign reporters. The surveyed correspondents appeared to be fairly highly educated. Almost all of them (94.3%) went through academic education, with 49 percent holding a Master degree and an additional 11.7 percent also a doctoral degree.

The survey respondents were on average 46.3 years old and had 19.9 years of professional experience, of which 12 years working as foreign correspondents. The differences between Austria, Germany, and Switzerland tend to be rather negligible. Across the board, the evidence shows that foreign correspondents tend to be fairly experienced journalists, and many of them did not start their journalistic careers as correspondents but usually worked as ‘domestic’ journalists for several years before they went abroad. Overall, the interviewed correspondents had reported about 9.8 years from their current post, which shows that being sent to Austria, Germany, and Switzerland is a long-term assignment. Freelancers had spent on average 2.9 years more in their current countries than employed journalists.

Almost half the correspondents we identified in the three countries originated from Europe, if we look at the location of their news companies’ headquarters. The home countries that send most correspondents to the three countries under consideration were Japan, the United States, and Germany, followed by considerable numbers of foreign correspondents from China and European countries such as Italy, France, Spain, and the United Kingdom (see Table 2).

The largest group of correspondents, however, was not sent by national media at all but by transnational news agencies: about 15 percent of correspondents came from Associated Press (AP), Reuters, Agence France Press (AFP), and Bloomberg. These agencies are based in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France; hence, counting them as national media would have increased the share of correspondents from these countries. Yet, as they serve audiences in a variety of countries, we would argue that they belong to a separate category: transnational media (for a typology, see Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg, 2009).

Looking at the country breakdown of the journalists’ origins, interesting culture-specific traits become visible (see Table 2). Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, for instance, are ‘exchanging’ journalists for foreign coverage to the extent that correspondents from Germany constitute by far the largest group in Austria and Switzerland (26% and 9%, respectively). Due to the large group of Turkish immigrants, Germany also receives quite a bit of attention from Turkey (in contrast to Switzerland and Austria). There is generally a tendency that neighboring countries send more correspondents into Austria, Germany, and Switzerland than those countries farther away. This is especially true for Germany (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Poland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands) and Switzerland (Austria, France, Italy, and Germany). Austria receives considerable attention from Hungary, but – contrasting the general pattern – relatively little from Italy.

Almost one-third of the correspondents work for daily newspapers. Public broadcasting, transnational news agencies, and national news agencies all provide about between 14 and 16 percent of the correspondent population. Pure online outlets hardly afford foreign correspondents, but correspondents working for newspapers also say that they work for the online editions of their papers. The data show that 55 percent of all interviewed correspondents produce content for only one media platform.

While daily newspapers are the biggest senders of correspondents to all three countries, there are some notable differences (see Table 2): in Germany, the dominance of the daily press correspondent looms largest, while Switzerland exhibits comparatively high levels of transnational news agencies, and Austria stands out due to a relatively strong presence of correspondents working with public broadcasting. This distribution shows how newspapers place their correspondents in the powerful countries (Germany), while public television also can afford correspondents in countries with less importance on the international stage (Austria). As some of the transnational news agencies have a clear focus on economic issues (Reuters, Bloomberg) and as they seem, given their transnational elite audiences, more interested in international organizations than other media, they send a lot of correspondents to Switzerland, which hosts the headquarters of many multi-national corporations (in Zurich) and international organizations (in Geneva).

Austria, Germany, and Switzerland appear to generate enough news and seem to be important enough to keep the correspondents busy. Overall, almost half of the respondents said they reported about a single country (47.3%). This is especially true for Germany (50.4%), while less so for Austria (44.8%) and Switzerland (42.4%), which again reflects the greater importance of Germany in the international political arena. About one out of five journalists (19.5%) said that he or she reported from more than five countries. Foreign correspondents who cover several countries often report about Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. For foreign correspondents operating from Germany, popular combinations also include ‘Germany and the European Union’. Reporters based in Austria also report on Eastern Europe. From Switzerland, correspondents also cover Liechtenstein, France, and Italy, as well as the European Union and, of course, the UN from Geneva.

### *Changing working conditions*

Our second research question asked about the changing working conditions of foreign correspondents. Two-thirds of the interviewed correspondents were employed by their news outlets, while the remaining 34 percent said they worked as freelancers. Freelancers therefore still constitute the minority of correspondents. Yet, the share of freelancers is considerably higher than among domestic journalists in the three countries with 25 percent of national journalists in Germany (Weischenberg et al., 2006), 18 percent in Switzerland (Keel, 2011), and 11 percent in Austria (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2007). The share of freelancers among foreign correspondents is, with 44 percent, considerably larger in Austria than in Germany and Switzerland (33% and 30%, respectively), indicating the lower importance of Austria for foreign coverage.

More than half of the journalists (57%) worked exclusively for one news outlet. Another 38 percent of the correspondents interviewed said that they contributed to two to five media organizations. Only a relatively small minority of foreign correspondents (6%) works for five or more news organizations. The share of journalists working for one outlet only is highest in Switzerland (67%) and lowest in Austria (48%).

Very few correspondents said they had other employments in addition to being a journalist. Only 14 respondents out of 211 also specified a field of expertise other than journalism, most notably as researchers, writers, translators, as well as teachers and professors. It would be premature to conclude, however, that the economic conditions for foreign correspondents in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland generally allow for making a reasonable living, as we will show that the income of quite a few correspondents is rather modest.

Salaries of correspondents vary greatly, even when looking exclusively at full-time journalists (see Table 3): 27 percent of the full-time correspondents reported a monthly net income of less than 1000 Euros. There is a sharp contrast between journalists with a fixed contract and freelancers: one out of two freelancers earns less than 1000 Euros. In line with the costs of living, the income of foreign correspondents is highest in Switzerland. In Germany, 40 percent of the correspondents earn less than 1000 Euros. Different types of media organizations pay also vastly different salaries: newspaper journalists are paid much less than journalists working for public television or journalists with transnational news agencies, in which one out of two journalists earns more than 5000 Euros. This is one indication that being a foreign correspondent is not always the prestigious post that it used to be, especially if one works as a freelancer in Germany. Yet, the Reuters correspondent based in Switzerland may experience a very different job situation from the freelancer in Germany, as the analysis will show. Gender differences exist within the sample, but they are not statistically significant, indicating that the type of contract (being a freelancer), the media organization, and the host country are more powerful determinants of the income of foreign correspondents (see Table 3).

In addition to mapping the status quo, the study was interested in exploring and explaining the transformation of foreign correspondence. We had presented the journalists a list of statements about changes in their working environments and asked them to indicate to what extent they feel these are true. Quite surprisingly, given that these statements represent some widely shared assumptions in the literature on current trends in foreign correspondence (job cuts among foreign correspondents, substitution through parachute correspondents, etc.), most trends do not correspond to the perceptions of the journalists in the survey (see Table 4). Only three statements reached average levels of agreement above 3 on the 5-point scale: journalists are most likely to agree with the diagnosis that time pressure is increasing, that working conditions are deteriorating, and that news-gathering resources are shrinking. Still, except for the increasing time pressure, the share of correspondents who fully agree was below 50 percent. While the surveyed journalists confirmed that things are getting rather worse than better, there is no broad agreement on this issue and much less for many of the assumptions proposed in the literature. Looking at their own media organizations, correspondents disagree rather than agree with statements about editors at home, parachutes, locals, or amateurs replacing foreign correspondents. Only 19 percent agree with the observation that amateurs are increasingly replacing traditional foreign correspondents. In all, 30 percent fear that they might be losing their job as foreign correspondent in the near future. This figure might be troubling, but it also shows that more than two-thirds of the correspondents do not fear that their job might be cut.

Overall, there is a split between what academics assume to be trends in foreign correspondence and what is observed by the correspondents in the three countries under analysis: while there are trends of increased time pressure and cuts of news-gathering resources, there is not much evidence in our data for trends of new types of correspondents replacing the traditional foreign correspondent. Even the statement that the number of foreign correspondents in the journalists' own media organizations has been decreasing in the last 5 years received only modest support (Table 4).

A reliability analysis showed that the different trends could be combined into an index with high consistency, after excluding the variable time pressure (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82). The feeling of being under increasing time pressure does not seem to be clearly related to the other trends. In contrast to the other trends, the feeling of increasing time pressure is widely shared by many correspondents regardless of their host or home country, media type, or type of job contract. The other trends are more closely correlated: the strongest connection was between

the observation of reduced numbers of correspondents and the increase of parachute journalists ( $r = 0.61^{**}$ ) and being increasingly replaced by coverage from the headquarters ( $r = 0.58^{**}$ ). This shows that the new types of foreign correspondents, even if they are relatively rare as pointed out above, are indeed substituting rather than complementing traditional

**Table 3.** Net income of full-time journalists (N = 160).

Shares in %	Contract		Main media organization (N = 131)					Host country			Gender	
	Empl.	Freel.	Newsp.	Agency	PublTV	Transn. ag.	AT	CH	DE	M	F	
<1000	27	17	52	36	24	14	14	15	4	40	28	25
1001–5000	41	45	32	42	57	41	36	50	44	38	35	51
>5000	32	38	16	22	19	46	50	35	52	21	36	25
Cramer's V	0.36***		0.23*					0.29***			n.s.	

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 4.** Trends in foreign correspondence as perceived by FCs.

	N	M	SD	% agreement
Time pressure increasing	185	3.5	1.3	57.3
Working conditions deteriorating	174	3.3	1.1	44.3
Own resources cut (e.g. for travel)	177	3.3	1.5	49.2
FC's jobs lost (own organization/last 5 years)	181	3.0	1.6	41.4
Editors at home replacing FCs	179	2.8	1.4	35.2
Parachutes replacing FCs	177	2.8	1.5	37.3
Losing one's job (fear, near future)	182	2.6	1.5	30.2
Locals replacing FCs	178	2.5	1.5	30.3
Amateurs replacing FCs	177	2.1	1.4	18.6

FCs: foreign correspondents; SD: standard deviation.

The percentage agreement indicates what share of correspondents have fully agreed or agreed with the respective statement (sum of values 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale).

correspondents. Also, there is a strong correlation between the observation of shrinking news-gathering resources and fear of losing one's job in the near future ( $r = 0.52^{**}$ ). Budget cuts are perceived to be potential harbingers of layoffs.

While these trends appear not to worry the majority of correspondents, they do affect some of them more than others. We therefore tried to identify some of the factors that could explain this variation looking at differences at the individual level (gender, being a freelancer, belonging to a certain income group), the organizational level (media type), and country level (host country and home country). Analyses of variance showed that two factors turned out to be largely irrelevant for this question: gender and host country (see Table 5). All the other factors have significant power to explain differences in the assessment of some of the trends. The home country of the correspondent and, to a lesser degree, the type of contract (i.e. being a freelancer or not) are most powerful in explaining differential assessments of changes in foreign correspondence. More specifically, we found that correspondents from Spain differ (in spite of low case numbers) significantly from their colleagues from Germany and China: Spanish correspondents claimed more often that resources were cut, that correspondents were laid off, and that editors at home were replacing foreign correspondents. This reveals how the more general economic situation at home – the severe crisis of the Spanish economy in particular – influences the job outlook for foreign correspondents. American journalists are close to the average journalist in the sample in their assessments of the current changes in foreign correspondence (see Table 6).

**Table 5.** Identifying relevant explanatory factors (Variance explained, Eta<sup>2</sup>).

	Host country	Home country	Media type	Contract	Income	Gender
Time pressure increasing	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.00
Working conditions deteriorating	0.01	0.10	0.02	0.02 <sup>+</sup>	0.00	0.01
Own resources cut (e.g. for travel)	0.01	<b>0.40***</b>	0.03	<b>0.05**</b>	0.03 <sup>+</sup>	0.01
FC's jobs lost (own organization/last 5 years)	0.02	<b>0.43***</b>	0.02	<b>0.05**</b>	0.01	0.00
Editors at home replacing FCs	0.02	<b>0.23**</b>	<b>0.08**</b>	<b>0.08***</b>	<b>0.07**</b>	0.00
Parachutes replacing FCs	0.01	0.12	0.02	<b>0.04**</b>	0.03	0.00

Losing one's job (fear, near future)	0.01	<b>0.28**</b>	0.01	<b>0.03**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	0.00
Locals replacing FCs	0.01	0.10	<b>0.08**</b>	0.00	0.02	0.02 <sup>+</sup>
Amateurs replacing FCs	0.00	0.11	0.02	<b>0.04**</b>	0.03 <sup>+</sup>	0.00
Trend-index	0.00	<b>0.35***</b>	0.00	<b>0.07***</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	0.01

FCs: foreign correspondents.

<sup>+</sup>p < 0.1; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Trend-index: Cronbach's alpha = 0.82; time pressure excluded.

**Table 6.** Differences between five important home countries (mean values). [\[AQ8\]](#)

	China	Germany	USA	Japan	Spain	Eta <sup>2</sup>
Own resources cut (e.g. for travel)	1.63 <sup>a</sup>	3 <sup>a,b</sup>	3 <sup>b</sup>	3.22 <sup>b</sup>	4.67 <sup>c</sup>	0.40***
FC's jobs lost (own organization/last 5 years)	1.22 <sup>a</sup>	1.91 <sup>a</sup>	2.4	3.89 <sup>b</sup>	3.62 <sup>b</sup>	0.43***
Editors at home replacing FCs	1.57 <sup>a</sup>	1.37	2.13	3.00	3.38 <sup>b</sup>	0.23**
Losing one's job (fear, near future)	1.13 <sup>a</sup>	2.09	2.22	2.9 <sup>b</sup>	3.31 <sup>b</sup>	0.28**
Trend-index	1.67 <sup>a</sup>	2.38 <sup>a,b</sup>	2.49	2.80 <sup>b,c</sup>	3.37 <sup>b,c</sup>	0.35***

FCs: foreign correspondents.

N = 50. \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Mean values marked with different letters are (or tend to be) significantly different (Bonferroni, Games–Howell).

**Table 7.** Differences between important media types (mean values). [\[AQ9\]](#)

	Public broadc.	Newspaper	Nat. news agency	Transn. news agency	Eta <sup>2</sup>
Editors at home replacing FCs	2.93a	2.92a	2.7	1.9b	0.08**
Locals replacing FCs	2.24a	2.13a	2.52	3.23b	0.08**
Trend-index	2.75	2.71	2.75	2.67	0.00

FCs: foreign correspondents.

\*\*p < 0.01.

Mean values marked with different letters are (or tend to be) significantly different (Bonferroni, Games–Howell).

**Table 8.** Differences between freelancers and employed journalists (mean values). [\[AQ10\]](#)

	Employed	Freelancer	Eta <sup>2</sup>
Own resources cut (e.g. for travel)	3.05	3.77	0.05**
FC's jobs lost (own organization/last 5 years)	2.74	3.48	0.05**
Editors at home replacing FCs	2.52	3.39	0.08***
Trend-index	2.61	3.15	0.07***

FCs: foreign correspondents.

\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001.

The media type seems to determine the degree to which journalists agreed on the perception that editors at home are increasingly replacing foreign correspondent. This is somewhat more common in newspapers and public broadcasting stations but is hardly the case in a transnational news agency. The trend to employ local journalists, on the contrary, is something that journalists working for transnational news agencies were more likely to experience. This makes sense given that national media have their well-staffed headquarters at home, while the transnational news agencies have spread their staff across the world and they do not work for one specific home country (see Table 7).

The most consistent differences occurred between freelancers and journalists with fixed contracts (see Table 8). Freelancers experienced all trends to a substantial degree (thus scoring above 3 on the index). Most strongly, freelancers agreed that news-gathering resources were cut, but they also clearly see that numbers of foreign correspondents are going down and editors at home are replacing them.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study is a step to narrow down the research gap concerning mapping and understanding foreign correspondence in Europe. Apart from generating descriptive findings on foreign correspondents and their changing working conditions, the study aimed at exploring factors that influence the ways the working conditions of different types of correspondents diverge. Six findings stand out that deserve further discussion and which also call for further research beyond the scope of this article.

### *Stable demographics*

The first finding concerns the demographics of the typical foreign correspondent and fully confirms results from prior surveys of foreign correspondents in Europe and the United States (Junghanns and Hanitzsch, 2006; Willnat and Weaver, 2003): foreign correspondents are mostly experienced, highly educated men in their mid-40s. The fact that women journalists in the sample are, on average, not younger indicates that this gender imbalance is likely to persist for some time. Also, the new generation of foreign correspondents, which Archetti (2013) identified in her qualitative study of correspondents in London, is not (yet) visible in our sample.

### *Considerable attention for some small countries*

The relatively large number of correspondents deployed to Switzerland and Austria is quite surprising given the small size and modest power of the two countries. The fact that Switzerland hosts substantially more correspondents than Austria reveals another aspect of foreign correspondence: the high number of correspondents in Switzerland can be explained by the importance of the country as seat of important international organizations, banks, and large corporations. Many correspondents in Switzerland are primarily covering those players rather than, for example, Swiss politics and culture. Both Switzerland and Austria may differ from other small countries in this respect with Austria also having a legacy of and still being a gateway to Central Europe.

### *Origins of correspondents: The rise of Asia and of global news agencies*

The analysis of the host countries revealed three patterns. The first is rather well known from research on news geography: proximity is an important news factor in foreign coverage; thus, it comes as no surprise that German correspondents are dominant in Switzerland and Austria. More surprising is the fact that Japan outnumbers US correspondents, and China sends as many reporters as France. This may be related to both the economic importance of the three countries in the world economy and a waning interest among US media in covering Europe. In addition, we did not count AP and Reuters journalists as US correspondents although the two agencies' headquarters are seated in the United States: yet, these agencies, together with AFP and Bloomberg, are global media actors providing services for customers worldwide and not primarily for an American audience. Yet, these global agencies may serve as substitutes for the retreat of 'national' foreign correspondents, especially for US media.

### *Less change than expected: Stable working conditions*

Looking at the fundamentals of a journalist's working environment and given the chorus about change in journalism, this study finds remarkably stable working conditions for foreign correspondents: they do almost all work full-time in journalism. Roughly, one out of two journalists covers only one country and works for one media outlet. About one-third work as freelancers. This percentage seems to be increasing, as Junghanns and Hanitzsch (2006) found a much higher share (92%) of employed journalists among foreign correspondents in Germany. This may hint to where the deterioration of working conditions takes place: among the group of freelance journalists. Yet, the core of foreign correspondents still seems to work under rather stable working conditions. Almost none of the trends that we explored in this study was confirmed by a majority of the journalists, with the notable exception of increasing time pressure, on which most journalists in all three countries agreed. Yet, there was disagreement rather than agreement among correspondents concerning the perception of substantial cuts in the numbers of foreign correspondents, the fear to lose one's own job, as well as the substitution of resident correspondents through parachute correspondents, foreign editors in the headquarters, locals, or amateurs. All these trends outlined in the groundbreaking article by Hamilton and Jenner (2004) exist among foreign correspondents, as our data show. However, these trends, 10 years later, still do not concern the majority of correspondents. The traditional foreign correspondent is not only surviving but is doing relatively well – at least in terms of her or his subjective perception as gathered through this survey. Concerning the trends as hypothesized by Hamilton and Jenner (2004), one may distinguish between those trends referring to shrinking news-gathering resources and numbers of traditional correspondents, on one hand (*demise*), and flourishing new forms such as foreign correspondence by amateurs, editors at home, or parachute journalists, on the other (*substitution, differentiation*). Unfortunately, the trend of cutting back traditional forms of correspondence seems to be more clearly confirmed by our data than trends that relate to the substitution of the old through new forms.

### *Diverging worlds of foreign correspondence*

All of the above leads to the final and most important finding from this study. We observe diverging worlds of foreign correspondence. There are those correspondents who fear for their jobs and who worry about cutbacks of resources, increased use of parachute correspondents, and so on as indicated by the high correlations between all our trend variables. However, there are other correspondents, and they still form the majority, who – at least in their own view – work under fairly stable working conditions. The study has contributed some insights as to which journalists suffer and which types of correspondents continue to thrive. The host country (Germany vs Switzerland vs Austria) and gender are not really factors that discriminate correspondents with deteriorating working conditions from those that are still doing well. Being a freelancer, however, separates those with a more positive outlook from those that seem more worried about current changes. Freelancers also exhibited a very low income despite working full-time. Hence, it is those journalists who already work under difficult conditions who also experienced a further deterioration of their situation. Also, the country of origin explains whether correspondents see their resources being cut and their jobs being replaced by other (less costly) kinds of foreign correspondents. It is interesting to note that correspondents from the United States did not differ from the average correspondent in the sample: therefore, future studies should also reassess with a broader sample of journalists from the United States whether the trends of decline and substitution through new forms of foreign correspondence are as relevant as expected by former research. Finally, the media organization determines the type of change that journalists are experiencing. Transnational news agencies turn out to be employers of elite ‘premium-correspondents’ (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004) who are well paid and generally do not have to fear for their jobs. Thus, our findings indicate how different worlds of foreign correspondence are drifting further apart. Future analyses will have to be very careful with any statement about ‘foreign correspondents in country ...’ as the people formerly called ‘foreign correspondents’ should not be treated as a homogeneous group. This also offers avenues to be explored by future studies on the content that foreign correspondents produce: different worlds of foreign correspondence are likely to also characterize what journalists do and what they write. Here, combinations of content analysis and survey designs could be the way to advance our understanding of stability, change, and different patterns of foreign correspondence.

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### Note

1. It should be noted that Switzerland is a multi-lingual country, with German being the most widespread language.

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