

The Role of Policy Mixes in Enabling Journalism Innovation: A Transnational Study Across Five Countries

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Research has largely overlooked the macro-level conditions under which journalism innovation occurs. This study addresses the prevailing gap through a cross-country case study approach, critically examining the form, context, and nature of innovation policies for private media. Applying the policy mix framework, we analyze data from 30 semistructured interviews and 32 documents from Canada, Denmark, France, Norway, and the Netherlands. Our findings reveal that several countries have adopted a mix of different policy instruments to foster journalism innovation. They further show that innovation-policymaking for journalism often follows several uncoordinated, small events. However, despite societal trust in this type of public funding for journalism, inconsistency, incomprehensiveness, and incoherence persist in existing policy mixes. Our study yields significance for both academia and policymaking by underscoring the relevance of integrating innovation policy theory into journalism innovation research and providing practitioners with guidance for improving existing policy mixes in the future.

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Journalism faces a series of often intertwined challenges, including issues of its definition and demarcation from other types of content, technological changes, economic challenges, and threats to its legitimacy and authority (Buschow, 2020; Neff & Pickard, 2023; Park, Fisher, Fulton, & Picard, 2024). This situation affects all forms of journalism, albeit to varying degrees, regardless of whether the outlet is public or private, well-established or emerging, or for-profit or nonprofit. In this context, journalism innovation, defined as “the introduction of something new that adds value to customers and to the media organization” (García-Avilés, Carvajal-Prieto, De Lara-González, & Arias-Robles, 2018, p. 27), has often been presented as a remedy for the various challenges that journalism faces, showing potential avenues toward a future where it thrives once again (Bossio & Nelson, 2021). Literature on journalism innovation has thus expanded significantly over the years, particularly focusing on the role of individual journalists, newsrooms, as well as media organizations as agents of innovation (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020; García-Avilés, 2021).

However, research has given only limited attention to investigating the macro-level conditions under which journalism innovation can occur, the public guidelines shaping it, and the support measures provided by the state as an actor (Noster, 2024). For example, in recent years, several Western democracies have started to develop specific innovation policies to address emerging needs and challenges faced by privately owned media (European Commission Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, Henningsen Consulting, & Technopolis Group, 2024; Noster, 2024), including publicly listed corporations, conglomerates, and family-owned newspaper outlets, as well as newer ventures like news start-ups. Conversely, most existing research into public support for private media is still focused on funding mechanisms, such as traditional subsidy efforts for production and distribution (Grönlund, Villi, & Ala-Fossi, 2024; Murschetz, 2022; Myllylahti & Meese, 2024; Trappel, 2018), with only a few notable exceptions focused on innovation-enhancing instruments (see van Kranenburg, 2017). This is particularly noteworthy, as other fields such as sustainability and health have seen policy makers and scholars increasingly focus not only on individual innovation policies but also on their interactions (Mavrot, Hadorn, & Sager, 2019; Rogge & Reichardt, 2016). These combinations are commonly referred to as “innovation policy mix” (Cunningham, Edler, Flanagan, & Laredo, 2013, p. 1; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016, para. 1). Frameworks for analyzing these policy mixes already exist; adapting them to journalism studies may yield valuable insights (Noster, 2024).

Our study adopts a transnational approach examining innovation policies targeted at journalism in Canada, Denmark, France, Norway, and the Netherlands. The sample was deliberately constructed to include only democracies with long-established general press subsidies, minimal evidence of media capture, and proof of existing innovation support for journalism. At the same time, it accounts for the potential heterogeneity of policies based on differences in national media systems. We follow an exploratory case study approach to generate an in-depth, multifaceted understanding (Yin, 2018). Data collection involved 30 semistructured qualitative interviews and 32 legal texts, policy papers, and reports that were subject to qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). To structure our analysis, we have used the aforementioned policy mix framework, assessing the form, contextual factors, and nature of existing innovation policies

(Noster, 2024). This study thus emphasizes the critical exploration of the in situ practical conditions of these policies, rather than conducting an actual impact assessment of their performance.

The findings hold significance for journalism innovation research as they, for the first time, provide a transnational understanding of innovation policies for journalism. They demonstrate that policy mixes—combinations of different policy instruments deployed to foster journalism innovation—are present in several examined countries. This yields implications for both research and practice, emphasizing the potential of integrating the policy mix framework more strongly into journalism innovation research to examine the different macro-level conditions enabling journalism innovation. For practice, they potentially provide guidance for improving existing policy mixes.

In the following, we first introduce existing research on both journalism innovation and innovation policies, before outlining our methodology. At the core of our article are the empirical results, which are discussed based on the policy mix framework. Finally, we offer concluding remarks that critically discuss the implications of our findings for both research on and practice in journalism innovation policy.

Literature Review

Journalism Innovation and Innovation Policies

Innovation refers to the introduction of new solutions to an industry, in response to problems, challenges, or opportunities (Edler & Fagerberg, 2017). However, in both journalism research and practice, the term often remains ambiguous. This ambiguity is, on one hand, because of discussions about it tending to disproportionately focus on new technologies and digital products, suggesting that, in face of their various challenges, media organizations must merely adapt to technological changes to preserve journalism's public value (Bossio & Nelson, 2021; d'Haenens, Han Lo, & Moore, 2022). On the other hand, the term further appears elusive because determining what constitutes novelty, a characteristic usually associated with innovation, is challenging (Harbers, Banjac, & Eldridge II, 2024).

Over time, many technological innovations have been criticized as "bright shiny things" (Posetti, 2018, p. 9) that lack practical benefit for journalism, prompting calls for greater critical reflexivity of the term "innovation" itself (Creech & Nadler, 2018). More recent journalism scholarship thus describes innovation as "changes or transformations of news products, processes, and services irrespective of size, radicality and incrementality through the use of creative skills" (Meier & Graßl, 2024, p. 9). This perspective moves away from technological determinism, emphasizing interdepending forms of innovation beyond product development, such as process innovations (e.g., new workflows), positioning innovations (e.g., new target groups), paradigmatic innovations (e.g., new business models), and social innovations (e.g., solutions addressing societal needs). Also, it has been acknowledged that innovations manifest varying degrees of novelty, categorized along a continuum between incremental and radical (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013).

Research on journalism innovation has grown considerably over the last two decades, with a strong focus on its micro- and meso levels (Dogruel, 2015). This means that most studies have been invested in the role of individual innovation agents and specific entities like newsrooms, as well as of media and tech

companies as agents of innovation (García-Avilés, 2021). According to existing literature reviews, most researched areas include “diffusion theory, management, organizational culture, professional profiles, business models, genres and content, tools and technology, media labs and start-ups” (García-Avilés, 2021, p. 2), as well as audience engagement, newsroom convergence, networks, and social media (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020).

However, research has given only limited attention to investigating the framework conditions facilitating journalism innovation on the macro level, resulting in a lack of empirical understanding of how different market factors, societal norms, values, and, most importantly, policies may support or impede innovation (Noster, 2024). Traditionally, literature assigns the state’s role for journalism within Western countries to maintaining public service broadcasting, regulating media ownership, and providing subsidies to private media (Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, & Castro, 2014). In the context of innovation policy for journalism, some regulators increasingly emphasize the positive effect of public service broadcasters on private competitors by encouraging sector-wide innovation (Ofcom, 2024). Yet, they take an even more direct, explicitly supportive approach toward private media, which underscores their centrality in current innovation policymaking. For example, some governments have started to adopt specific innovation policies, such as tax credits on digital subscriptions and project-based innovation support (European Commission Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology et al., 2024; Noster, 2024). The idea is that a “carefully designed and evidence-based innovation policy is a potentially powerful instrument to increase the journalistic and economic performance of news organizations and to ensure their sustainability” (García-Avilés, 2021, p. 10).

Despite these developments in practice, research into public support for private media is still primarily concerned with a synopsis of general subsidies (Grönlund et al., 2024; Murschetz, 2022; Myllylahti & Meese, 2024; Trappel, 2018) or ad hoc support during the COVID-19 pandemic (Schiffrin, 2021a). A notable exception is the edited volume by van Kranenburg (2017) that includes several country reports on innovation policies for journalism. However, it includes no comparative element, making it difficult to make any systemic generalizations or develop theories based on it.

The Policy Mix Framework in Journalism

The scarcity of research in this area led us outside of our field, integrating approaches from general innovation policy into journalism innovation research. In its broader, nonjournalism-related understanding, innovation policy encompasses all efforts undertaken by governments to influence innovation processes (Borrás & Edquist, 2013). Its primary goal is to enhance economic growth, though often addressing societal well-being as well (Bleyen, Lindmark, Ranaivoson, & Ballon, 2014). Innovation policy instruments can be grouped into three categories: regulatory, such as laws and directives; economic, such as grants, subsidies and taxes; and soft, such as voluntary codes of conduct or public/private partnerships (Bemelmans-Videc, Rist, & Vedung, 2011). Governments have increasingly recognized the need to consider a combination of these instruments to fully address public issues, a concept commonly referred to as “innovation policy mix” (Cunningham et al., 2013, p. 1). Innovation policy mixes “comprise the full range of policy instruments and strategies deployed to foster innovation. They are characterised by complex and dynamic interactions . . . between different governance levels” (Howoldt, 2024, p. 1).

In recent years, a framework was introduced to analyze policy mixes in numerous fields such as sustainability and health (Mavrot et al., 2019; Rogge & Reichardt, 2016). Its holistic and systemic approach allows for a proper policy description, making its import to journalism studies a logical yet unexplored step (Noster, 2024; see Figure 1).

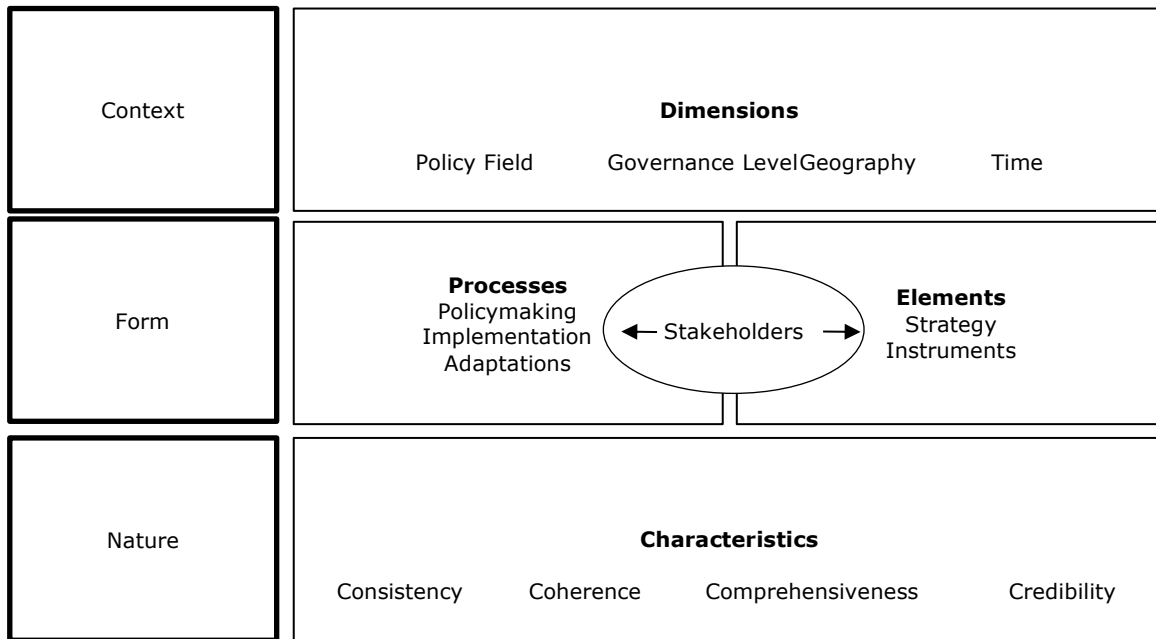


Figure 1. Model for policy mix analysis.

Note. Source: Own illustration, based on Mavrot et al. (2019) and Rogge and Reichardt (2016).

At the center of this framework stands the form (i.e., the elements), referring to the design of the innovation policy instruments as well as their strategy and objectives. By incorporating the policy processes (Howlett & Giest, 2015) and the stakeholders connecting both elements and processes, the concept also allows for a systemic framing (Rogge & Reichardt, 2016). In addition, the framework allows for a comprehensive examination of the context for innovation policies, including interactions among different governance levels and policy fields, national and regional capabilities, and timing. Finally, it introduces a set of characteristics to determine the nature of the policy mix, including its consistency, coherence, comprehensiveness, and credibility. This aspect of the framework is crucial, as these characteristics may have an impact on the mix’s actual performance when evaluated against standard assessment criteria.

Research Questions

Our literature review has demonstrated a global surge in the implementation of innovation policies for private-sector journalism in practice and a lack of comparative research analyzing them in scholarly work. In an attempt to address this research gap, we developed three research questions that expand on the policy mix framework outlined before.

Our initial step involves a transnational mapping to assess the form of existing innovation policies, including different types of instruments and their rationales. We ask:

RQ1: How are innovation policies for journalism designed?

In a second step, we aim to understand how different contexts, such as time, governance levels, and policy fields, may influence the development of these policies, by asking:

RQ2: What contextual factors and considerations led to the specific design of these policies?

Finally, we aim to understand how combinations of these policies perform and describe their nature. We pose the following question:

RQ3: How can the nature of these policy mixes be characterized?

Method

Our study follows a qualitative case study approach triangulating multiple sources of data (Yin, 2018) to generate an in-depth, multifaceted understanding of the form, context, and nature of innovation policies for journalism.

Case Selection

The case selection employed a processual approach (see Figure 2), starting with the inclusion of only democracies (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023), a criterion frequently endorsed by scholars such as Neff and Pickard (2023). This helped us establish a common political framework for the selection process, identifying 72 democratic countries globally. Refinement involved narrowing down to those with satisfactory press freedom scores based on the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2022), resulting in a set of 40 countries. This decision was undertaken to exclude countries where governments use funding to control the media, a phenomenon commonly referred to as media capture (Dragomir, 2018; Schiffrin, 2021b). Within this subset, our analysis considered only those countries that at the time of research provided general direct subsidies to journalism (Trappel, 2018), which left us at a total of 17 countries. Out of these, only countries with active state-funded innovation support for privately owned media were included, excluding funding for public-service media and programs organized by foundations, NGOs, and private stakeholders, such as the Google News Initiative. In 2023, this selection process yielded a final set of 10 countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

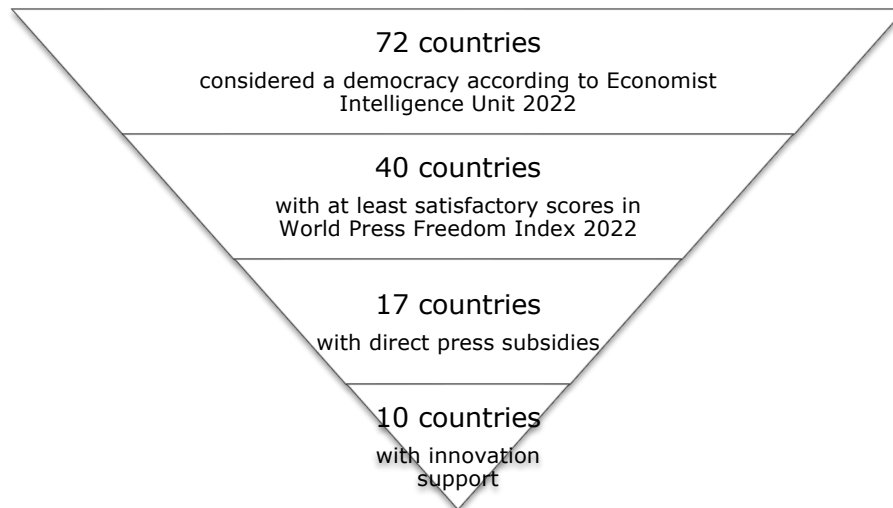


Figure 2. Selection process.

Note. Source: Authors' illustration.

From the initial pool of 10 identified countries, five countries were consciously selected for further analysis: Canada, Denmark, France, Norway, and the Netherlands. This selection was guided by the principle of controlled variance (Achtenhagen & Cestino, 2020), in an attempt to choose countries that held the potential to each be revelatory (Yin, 2018). To ensure comprehensive variance, we relied on a classic typology of media systems research (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), categorizing countries into the liberal model (e.g., Canada), the polarized-pluralist model (e.g., France), and the democratic corporatist model (e.g., Netherlands, Scandinavia). To further enhance the contextual relevance of our study, we integrated more pragmatic variables pertaining to variance, encompassing geographic, political, temporal, and linguistic dimensions (e.g., country size, political system, European Union [EU] membership, continental affiliation, etc.).

Data Selection

The data gathered for this article represent a unique data set of documents and interviews. Legal texts, commissioned reports, and policy papers were chosen through a combination of online research on government websites and suggestions provided by interviewees later on. Although documents serve as an efficient data source, it is crucial to approach them not as objective statements of facts but rather as products inherently embedded in their political and social contexts (Bowen, 2009; Karpinnen & Moe, 2019). Sources were consequently selected based on the relevancy and credibility of the stakeholder or organization authoring a document. A total of 32 documents overall were collected and, if necessary, translated into English (see supplementary file²).

² The supplementary file is accessible via the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/vthrz/?view_only=6f595650a328435b9efe33ffd5f4027b

The data collection further involved 30 semistructured qualitative interviews with key decision makers (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009) responsible for managing innovation support schemes in the selected countries as well as with beneficiary organizations and external observers. In addition, we conducted preliminary interviews with two general journalism funding experts (see supplementary file). Interviews lasted about one hour on average. Potential interviewees were determined based on iterative desk research on the basis of documents and through a process of network sampling to reach data saturation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The goal of these interviews was to gain access to contextual expert knowledge that could not be yielded through document analysis (Van Selm & Helberger, 2019). See Table 1 for details.

Table 1. Data Collected for Each Selected Country.

Country	Number of Documents	Number of Interviews
Canada	6	4
Denmark	7	5
France	6	7
Norway	7	6
The Netherlands	6	6
Cross-Country Experts	-	2
Σ	32	30

Note. Source: Own illustration.

The applied semistructured interview guide allowed the interviewers to explore issues brought forward by the interviewees while allowing room for follow-up questions based on their responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Van Selm & Helberger, 2019). In Canada, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands, interviews were held in English. In France, interviews were conducted in French and later translated into English. Interviews were conducted both virtually using Zoom and in person.

Data Analysis

Documents were carefully read before the interviews to ensure contextual understanding and to improve preparation of the interview guides. However, the actual coding process commenced only after all data, including documents and interview transcripts, were collected and aggregated in the case database in our analysis software ATLAS.ti. We then conducted a mixed qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014).

On one hand, our initial phase of coding was based on a deductive strategy, specifically employing structural coding following the policy mix framework (Figure 1). The intention was to systematically apply categories across each country's data and filter out specific aspects of the material based on these predetermined ordering criteria (Saldaña, 2013). On the other hand, we had to further include inductive category formation, to expand our categorization in cases where the policy mix framework was not specific enough (Mayring, 2014). Hence, we further incorporated categories both alongside and beneath the preset ones, enhancing the depth and complexity of our qualitative findings. In a second coding cycle, we proceeded to refining and condensing the material within each category.

In a final step, we explored relationships between different categories and derived common patterns and themes across all countries, which then led to writing our results section. To illustrate our findings, we use both illuminating quotes and indirect references. Each reference was designated with a country code (e.g., CA for Canada), an abbreviation indicating the source material (e.g., LT for legal text), and a corresponding number (for details, see tables in the supplementary file).

Results

Approaches to Supporting Journalism Innovation in the Examined Countries

To answer RQ1, we have examined the form of innovation policies for journalism in the selected countries. Our findings show that the predominant form of innovation support for journalism in all countries is consistently economic, most importantly by the means of direct financial subsidies. We thus devote substantial attention to their description (see Table 2), notwithstanding some recent indications of other economic, regulatory, or even softer instruments potentially supporting innovation, such as tax credits, coaching, or research support.

Table 2. Overview of Innovation Subsidies in Examined Countries.

	Name	Admini- stratio- n	Selecti- on Criteria	Selecti- on Proces- s	Target Group	Supp- ort Type	Payout Mechanis- m	€/Year	Star- t in
CA	CPF— Business Innovation	Ministry	Very differen- tiated	Internal	Community media, magazines	Finan- cial only	Matching principle, max. €340.000 per project	~€1,3 mil. (2020)	2010
DK	Innovation- spuljen	External Body	Very differen- tiated	External Jury	Established media Start-ups	Finan- cial only	Matching principle, no payout limit	~€2.6 mil. (2021)	2014
FR	FSDP	Ministry	Very differen- tiated	External Jury	Established media	Finan- cial only	Matching principle, no payout limit	€10 mil. (2015)	2012
FR	FSEIP	Ministry	Differen- tiated	External Jury	Start-ups Scientists Incubators	Finan- cial only	Full funding, max. €50.000 per project	~€1,2 mil. (2021)	2016

NL	SVDJ— Accelerator or	External Body	Simple	External Jury	Established media Start-ups	Finan cial and coachi ng	Full funding, max. 100.000€ per project	€1 mil. (2021)	2011
NO	Innovasjo ns- og utviklings -tilskudd	Media Regulat or	Differen tiated	External Jury	Established Media Start-ups	Finan cial only	Matching principle, no payout limit	~€1,8 mil. (2023)	2018

Note. Source: Authors' illustration based on interviews and program websites

Instruments are typically aligned with two rationales: First, and most important, to uphold journalism and its role in contributing to a healthy democracy, and second, to bolster its economic viability (DK-LT3, FR-LT1, NO-LT1, NO-LT2, NL-LT1, NL-LT2). These rationales are expounded on through laws, guidelines on program websites, governmental budget proposals (FR-EX5, NO-F1, NL-F1), or media agreements between the governing parties (DK-EX3).

Innovation subsidies for journalism all have in common that they are organized in the form of special, project-based funds (CA-F1, DK-LT3, FR-F1, NO-F1, NL-F1). This means that to receive innovation funding, applicants must submit a detailed application, which makes the administration of the fund, as well as the selection process, all the more important but also more complex. Selection criteria are usually rather diversified, including the need for an editor in chief (DK-LT3, NO-LT1), must-carry requirements for political, economic, and socially relevant content (DK-LT3, FR-LT1, NO-LT1), or designations as qualified journalism organizations (CA-LT1, FR-LT1).

Beneficiaries for all funds are established legacy media and start-ups, with the exception of the French *Fonds de soutien à l'émergence et à l'innovation dans la presse* [Support Fund for Emerging Media and Press Innovation] (FSEIP), which considers only companies younger than three years (FR-LT1) and the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF), which considers only magazines and community media (CA-F1). In recent years, eligibility criteria and payout mechanisms were adjusted to better support smaller local media organizations (NO-EX1, NO-B1) as well as online media (CA-EX1, CA-R1, DK-B1, FR-EX1). Administration is often organized through an external government body, such as state-related agencies or media regulators. The idea is to avoid any impression of governmental influence on journalism (NL-F1, NO-F1). For further safeguarding, in all countries but Canada, an external jury is in charge of selecting the projects that ought to be funded (DK-EX2, FR-F1, NL-F2, NO-EX1).

Each of these funds typically hands out between 1 and 3 million euros per year (for purposes of simplification and comparison, noneuro currencies were converted into euros), with only the French *Fonds stratégique pour le développement de la presse* [Strategic Fund for Press Development] (FSDP), providing a higher amount. Most countries pursue a matching principle, meaning they contribute between 40% and 60% of the overall amount a media organization would need to run a project (DK-LT3, FR-LT1, NO-LT1). In Denmark and Norway, they have included an exception for smaller companies or those benefiting

underserved groups of society (e.g., children), where up to 75% matching would potentially be possible (DK-LT3, NO-B1).

The French FSEIP and the Dutch Journalism Fund *Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek* (SVDJ) are unique in providing full funding support, capped at €50.000 and €100.000, respectively (FR-B1, NL-R2). They also differ in their additional support provided to the media industry, demonstrating that instruments can extend beyond mere subsidies for media organizations. For example, the FSEIP offers additional funding streams for media incubators and media researchers (FR-LT1). Similarly, the Dutch SVDJ integrates training in its accelerator, with a specific program that provides guidance and support to news start-ups, covering topics such as business models, design thinking, and market research. In addition, they offer an accelerator light program solely for coaching. Aside from the accelerator, SVDJ also funds researchers through a separate stream (NL-R3).

Finally, France and Canada have recently started to employ a wider range of indirect policy measures alongside their more select direct innovation subsidy schemes. These include tax credits on digital subscriptions in Canada and legal provisions to allocate charitable status to media organizations in both countries. In Canada, temporary 15% tax credits on digital subscriptions apply to amounts paid by individuals to a qualified Canadian journalism organization (CA-EX1). For the charitable status, Canadian media can apply for qualified *donnée* status under the Income Tax Act (CA-B1), whereas in France, online media can register for donations through a third-party platform called *J'aime l'info* that equally acts according to tax law (FR-EX1). These additional economic and regulatory instruments, often mentioned alongside direct innovation subsidies, aim to similarly instigate industry change, even though innovation is not always their only or even explicit goal (CA-R4, FR-EX1).

Contextual Factors Influencing Innovation Policies for Journalism

Against the backdrop of RQ2, we examined the contextual factors leading to the introduction of innovation policies in the five countries under examination. Subsequent to that objective, our findings suggest that the choice for specific innovation policy instruments in all our selected cases remains a national matter. Even in federal states like Canada, where provinces such as Quebec or Ontario have their independent support programs for journalism, the national strategy retains considerable influence (CA-EX1). This holds equally true for countries bound by EU regulations, such as France, Denmark, and the Netherlands. The EU appears less as an initiator or driver of public support for journalism but more as a regulator (e.g., through regulations such as the Digital Services Act or the European Media Freedom Act, FR-EX2).

At first glance, this suggests the need to analyze how broader system contexts may influence policy formation, such as the perception of liberal governments' limited involvement in journalism support or democratic corporatist countries' significant investments (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, it appears that innovation policymaking for journalism does not necessarily align with standard media systems theory; rather, it often emerges from a series of small, nonlinear developments.

For example, in the context of policymaking, a certain degree of randomness can be observed equally across liberal (Canada), democratic corporatist (Denmark, Netherlands, Norway), and polarized-pluralist models (France). In 2010, then-Dutch Minister for Education, Culture, and Science, Ronald Plasterk, incidentally allocated a one-time €8 million to support journalism innovation, a funding that ultimately transformed the old Dutch corporate fund for the press into the new incentive-oriented SVDJ (NL-R2, NL-F2). In contrast, Norway introduced its innovation grants following extended discussions on the role of public service broadcaster NRK, which were eventually accompanied by a government-appointed committee working on how to enhance media diversity in the country. The committee's report drew inspiration from nearby countries like Sweden and Denmark, which already had innovation subsidies for journalism (NO-R1, NO-R2), recommending to follow suit. France implemented its FSDP in response to an academic report, whereas the FSEIP followed a strategic objective to support media start-ups (FR-F1, FR-EX3). In Canada, the business innovations component of the Periodical Fund was introduced alongside a general overhaul of their press subsidies in 2010 (CA-EX1).

The implementation and subsequent adjustment of these funds, but also their expansion through other instruments, involved a diverse range of stakeholders, such as ministries (CA-EX1), juries (NO-EX1), journalism associations (CA-EX1, DK-B2, FR-EX1, NO-B1), and media organizations (DK-EX2) themselves. For example, Denmark shifted to technology-neutral, platform-agnostic support in 2023 after Zetland, a popular Danish media start-up, almost became ineligible for further innovation funding because of its audio-centricity (DK-B1). France allowed for charitable donations to newspapers following an initiative by a journalism association (FR-EX1). The country further initiated a government-led process called *États Généraux* (General Assembly) in 2023, engaging the public and private sector, academia, and civil society to reform its media policy (FR-PP1). Finally, in Canada, journalism innovation policy underwent modernization, including a shift of the Periodical Fund to also consider online-only magazines and the introduction of more indirect instruments such as tax credits, following a change in government, a change of personnel in the ministry in charge, and the publication of an external report on the state of the media between 2015 and 2020 (CA-EX1). These examples illustrate that the development of innovation policies for journalism requires the continuous coordination of multiple stakeholders across various policy fields, yet, all contribute to decision making at the national governance level.

The Nature of Innovation Policy Mixes for Journalism

To address RQ3 and describe the actual nature of innovation policy mixes for journalism, we analyzed their characteristics in each country and summarized our insights in the following.

Consistency: Complexities of Defining and Evaluating Innovativeness

In the context of the innovation policy mix for journalism, consistency entails the policy mix operating in a predictable manner, with its elements aligned in such a way that they ensure reliability and stability (Rogge & Reichardt, 2016). Based on our findings, it is evident that, in particular, after the introduction of new innovation subsidies, most countries run regular budget controls (DK-EX3, FR-EX3, FR-EX5, NO-F1), but wait between four and five years before conducting in-depth evaluations, if at all (see CA-R4, NL-R3, FR-R2, FR-R3 as examples). Adjustments are made regardless, although they are not

always guided by a clear strategy or evaluation. Parts that are most susceptible to adaptation appear to be the funding amount, eligibility criteria for beneficiaries, payout mechanisms, and the incorporation of soft tools, such as coaching (CA-R2, DK-EX3, DK-B1, NO-EX1). Yet, once a fund was introduced, it was never abolished and the concern arises as to whether such a system truly promotes stability and sustains journalism or if it inadvertently maintains the status quo, potentially stifling natural innovation within the industry (CA-EX1, NO-EX3), or even rewarding those innovations that would have emerged anyways (Picone & Pauwels, 2013).

Similarly, the consistency of indirect innovation policies has been somewhat uncertain. Canada, for example, offers tax credits for digital subscriptions and a charitable tax for nonprofit media, aiming to enhance support and foster innovation. However, the impact of both policies has been modest so far, most likely because of limited credit and reluctance among journalism entrepreneurs, established media, and philanthropists to embrace nonprofit journalism (CA-B1, CA-R4). Consequently, it appears that innovation policies do not consistently align in a manner that they ensure stability yet, regardless of whether they are direct or indirect, economic or regulatory.

A contributing factor to this inconsistency may be the lack of clarity about the overarching objective of innovation policies. For example, not all countries have a clear definition of the term "innovation," which partly reflects the ambiguity of the term also seen in academia. In some cases, interviewees mentioned that innovation was "a little hard to define" (CA-F1) or that policy makers were operating with a rather broad definition so that it could always be decided case-by-case whether an idea was innovative or not (CA-R3). Such broader definitions would include the description of innovation as the adoption or use of new technologies and infrastructure (CA-R3, DK-LT3), the development of new publications, and online news services (FR-LT1) but also "the successful implementation of new ideas, processes, products or services" (Medietilsynet, 2021, p. 316; see Supplementary File NO-R2) to increase productivity, performance, and sustainability. As a French interviewee put it, "innovation can take many forms" (FR-EX1).

The challenge with such broad definitions is that the subjects of support become very broad too, often leading to limited innovativeness and an overemphasis on new technologies and products as the primary dimensions of innovation (Picone & Pauwels, 2013). For example, an evaluation in Canada found that the business innovation component of the CPF "had typically been funding website changes and refreshes (including updates to make websites mobile friendly or to allow financial transactions), social media strategy development, surveys of potential readerships, rebranding, or other market research activities" (Canadian Heritage Evaluation Services Directorate, 2022, p. 19; see Supplementary File CA-R3). Similarly, it was unveiled in France that the publishing group *Libération* used part of their FSDP subsidies to acquire 190 new laptops for their newsroom and adopt a new content management system (FR-R2). Although these projects may possess inherent value, they show limited alignment with commonly held views about innovation. In addition, yet another challenge arises not only from defining innovation, but also from evaluating it, as most governments struggle in monitoring projects altogether (CA-F1, FR-F1, FR-EX1, FR-EX3, NO-F1). The Netherlands stands out as the sole country considering the "achievement of pre-set objectives, impact of projects on other parties and continuation of projects after the grant ended" (Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek, 2014, pp. 36–37; see Supplementary File NL-R2), a simple

approach that could also offer clarity in defining individual innovation goals and impact tracking and ensure consistency across other countries.

Comprehensiveness: Absence of Fully Effective Instrument Mixes for Journalism Innovation

Comprehensiveness refers to the breadth and number of innovation policies implemented in a country to cover all aspects of the intended rationales (Noster, 2024). We have found that direct subsidies represent the predominant form of innovation policies across all examined countries, though some have indeed started to introduce a number of indirect policies. As mentioned in a Canadian report, "The solution to the financing crisis in contemporary journalism is multi-dimensional, not singular. It requires a toolkit to support the launch of a new media system and a content-rich bridge to the future" (Public Policy Forum, 2022, pp. 37–38; see Supplementary File CA-R4).

Based on our findings, current innovation policies for journalism can be categorized into four main types. Direct subsidies provide financial assistance to established media organizations or start-ups to support their innovation projects and address funding gaps. Indirect support for infrastructure focuses on ensuring project sustainability and integration into the media market. For example, the Dutch SVDJ made an attempt at incorporating more "soft" instruments like networking and training (NL-F2). Recently, they even introduced an accelerator light, providing coaching without the financial support (NL-R4). A Dutch interviewee said that "you need to think more in terms of direct [financial] subsidies and indirect subsidies of coaching" (NL-F1). Policies targeting the broader ecosystem strengthen systemic capacities, for example, by supporting incubators and fostering academic research (CA-EX1, FR-LT1, NL-R1, NL-R2, NL-R4). Finally, tax credits for digital subscriptions or granting *donnée* status to media organizations aim to stimulate innovation by creating demand (CA-EX1, FR-EX1). However, none of the countries that we examined implements the full range of these types of instruments, indicating that a fully comprehensive innovation policy mix has not yet been developed.

Apart from the comprehensiveness of the instruments, another challenge lies within the fact that innovation support in all examined countries, in particular with direct subsidies, is project-based. Reasons for this include the desire for greater risk management given the uncertain success rate of innovation projects (DK-EX2, NL-F1), as well as the need for flexibility in resource allocation to address emerging trends or pressing needs within the journalism industry (CA-EX1). In consequence, innovation funding remains much more unpredictable, though, with supported projects facing the threat of abrupt termination when funding periods end. This prompts a Dutch interviewee to express that fund recipients "would like to have more stability . . . more continuity and a bit more guarantee," given that most journalistic projects cannot be completed within one-year funding cycles (NL-B2). Additionally, limited funding poses constraints, impacting the ability of organizations seeking innovation support to implement products and processes that are actually considered innovative (CA-R3). Interviewees agreed that higher matching percentages and reduced red tape in the application process could potentially inspire more innovation (CA-B1, NO-B2). This holds particularly true when comparing the rather small amounts allocated to innovation support with the significant sums dedicated to production and distribution subsidies across all countries. For example, Denmark invested €49 million in production subsidies (2021), Norway €36 million (2021; Nordicom, 2022), and Canada €48 million (2020; CA-R3). Moreover, in some countries like France, funds intended for

innovation may not even be used for their intended purpose, as observed by one interviewee who noted “that innovation grants were either under-used or not used at all. When I say under-used, I mean that some of them, notably those earmarked for the FSDP, are automatically redirected to support the distribution network . . . *France Messageries*” (FR-EX4). To conclude, despite beneficiaries across all countries somewhat acknowledging the relevance of innovation support on the industry (DK-B1, DK-B2, FR-B1, NO-B2, NL-B1), it appears to remain, as one interviewee described it, “a very small drop in the large ocean” (DK-EX2).

Coherence: Deficient Coordination Across Governance Levels and Policy Fields

Coherent policy processes can usually be achieved through “strategic planning, coordinating structures and communication networks” (Rogge & Reichardt, 2016, p. 1626). To oversee the governance of innovation policies for journalism, it typically falls within the purview of ministries responsible for culture and media, as observed in all the examined countries. However, on closer examination, additional ministries also play a role, including ministries of economy or finance. Indeed, policies pertaining to innovation support for journalism intersect across various domains, notably platform, tax, and competition policy (CA-EX1, DK-LT5, NO-R1).

On one hand, however, our research reveals a notable lack of alignment among different public stakeholders about innovation policies for journalism and their corresponding responsibilities. For example, in Canada, Canadian Heritage oversees all matters related to the CPF. When Finance Canada introduced a new Labor Tax Credit for media organizations in 2019 without consulting Canadian Heritage, this led to several complications, as changes to the CPF had simultaneously been planned. One interviewee observed that Finance Canada

come up with all kinds of programs, [but] they don’t necessarily discuss a whole lot with their colleagues from the [affected] sector [ed. note: the media sector]. [Canadian Heritage] never heard anything from the tax side of things before [they] proposed [their] change. (CA-EX1)

Similarly, a French interviewee pointed at the accumulation of journalism support, saying that “over the years, we’ve piled up a lot of different [press] subsidies. It’s not necessarily clear or easy to understand, but we’re trying to simplify them” (FR-F1). With such path dependency, a lot of different policies are not well-aligned, also making it difficult for potential beneficiaries to correctly access them (FR-EX1, CA-B1). In comparison, for the Dutch SVDJ, additional funding lines were equally introduced over time, but with the aim to address local and investigative journalism separately, while still ensuring continued relevance to recipients of innovation support within that funding line (NL-F1). Instruments were thus not just accumulated but rather added or changed based on evidence. This highlights that the challenge lies not solely in the quantity of policies but rather in their alignment.

On the other hand, we can further observe a lack of alignment between innovation policies specifically targeted at journalism and a country’s classic innovation policy, such as entrepreneurship or cluster policy. For example, the state-owned national development bank *Innovasjon Norge* runs the Norwegian Innovation Clusters (NCE) to stimulate entrepreneurship in Norway around different fields such

as energy transition, maritime cleantech, and health but also media. The NCE Media cluster is located in the *Media City Bergen* and attempts to support AI, AR, robotics, and tools for visual storytelling (NO-EX3). However, Norwegian interviewees confirmed that measures from *Innovasjon Norge*, administered through the Ministry of Trade, and the country's innovation and development grants for journalism, administered through the media regulator *Medietilsynet*, operate without active exchange between each other (NO-F1). Similarly, in Denmark, while there have been suggestions to copy measures from the general Danish Innovation Fund *Innovationsfonden* and apply them within the Danish Innovation Fund for Journalism *Innovationspuljen*, this interconnection has not yet been realized (DK-PP2).

Credibility: High Societal Trust in Public Support for Journalism Innovation

Credibility describes the trustworthiness of a policy mix, meaning the trust people have in its ability to address current innovation issues within the media industry. It also implies the question whether these public funds foster a dependence of journalism on the state, allowing it to control the media, capture, and keep it in line (Dragomir, 2018; Schiffrin, 2021b). Through analysis of both comments made during the interviews and statements made in the documents (e.g., hearing notes and policy papers), it appears that the examined governments are usually seen as operating at a safe distance from journalists (CA-R1, NL-EX1, NO-R2), with only occasional awareness that at least direct subsidies might create financial dependence of the media on public funds (FR-EX3, FR-EX4, DK-B2). For example, the French *États Généraux* suggested that there was a need to overhaul the overall legal framework for journalism and discuss how the media industry is changing and how the law should adapt as well (FR-F1, FR-PP1). However, apart from that, the only strong opposition against public support for journalism in the investigated countries seems to come from either those who did not receive funds (DK-EX3) or right-wing parties (NL-F2). These trust levels might, on one hand, be linked to a prevalent presence of high social capital across all the countries under examination, indicating that people would generally trust each other as well as institutions, including public bodies and media organizations (DK-B2, FR-EX2, NL-B1, NO-PP1). In addition, based on our selection criteria (see "Case Selection"), people in the examined countries had already been accustomed to general press subsidies for a long time, presumably impacting their perception of innovation support for journalism as well.

Conclusion and Implications

Based on the policy mix framework, we were able to analyze the form, context, and nature of innovation policies for journalism. Our study thus adopted a critical perspective on these innovation policies, not because it offers an evaluation of their actual impact on beneficiaries but because it allows for an analysis of their in situ opportunities and, more importantly, weaknesses in their emergence and implementation.

First, we observed that although journalism innovation policies across countries predominantly take the form of direct financial subsidies, Canada, France, and the Netherlands have each started implementing additional economic, regulatory, or soft instruments. These include tax credits, support for incubators and researchers, coaching, and networking events. These measures support not only individual media organizations in their innovation processes but also the wider innovation ecosystem, the available support infrastructure, and demand from audiences for specific innovations. They demonstrate that there is most

likely no silver bullet—a single instrument capable of addressing all innovation challenges in journalism—but instead highlight the potential of policy mixes (RQ1).

Second, our research shows that it is usually several uncoordinated, small events leading to the adoption of different innovation policies for journalism. In that regard, the policy mix framework appears beneficial as it allows for the analysis of all contextual factors that contribute to the development of each country's policy landscape, including numerous stakeholders, governance levels, and policy fields (RQ2).

Finally, our findings indicate that current innovation policy mixes for journalism in most countries share similar weaknesses. For example, policies sometimes lack consistency, as they frequently follow technocentric definitions of innovation. Also, not all countries have yet adopted a fully comprehensive policy mix—likely because of concerns about the associated costs, the organizational demands on administration to implement more measures, and the lack of a proof of concept, as the impact of these initiatives may become evident only after extended periods of time. Moreover, there is limited coordination between key ministries, such as culture, education, finance, and economy, in developing innovation policies for journalism, and aligning them with the country's overall innovation policy. However, the high trust in public institutions across all examined countries suggests potential for expanding and refining these policies in the future and determining what constitutes an optimal mix (RQ3).

Our findings can contribute to the advancement of research and practice. On one hand, for research, they show the significance of integrating theory from innovation policy research in academic discourse on journalism innovation. In this context, using the policy mix concept as an analytical framework allows for a thorough analysis of actual policies, a contextual understanding of their genesis, and a critical exploration of the characteristics of their combinations within broader policy mixes. This approach challenges the prevailing analytical frameworks in the literature on journalism support by shifting the focus toward innovation and widening the scope for properly investigating its macro-level conditions (Dogruel, 2015).

On the other hand, our findings may inspire practitioners to continue working on and improving existing policy mixes. By emphasizing the interplay between policies, the framework encourages practitioners to account for synergies and conflicts, fostering greater alignment among diverse stakeholders and enhancing the overall consistency and comprehensiveness of policy design.

Our study has limitations that emphasize the necessity of further research. Notably, it did not assess the actual outcomes of the innovation policies examined but focused on their practical form, context, and nature. Future research needs to address this gap and adopt typical assessment criteria to empirically evaluate their impact, such as effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and feasibility. For example, both quantitative and qualitative research into the actual impact of innovation policies on beneficiaries could prove valuable. This is particularly relevant given that existing scholarly work suggests innovation policies may also yield unintended consequences (Myllylahti & Meese, 2024). For example, if not carefully managed, policies could potentially inhibit innovation (Patanakul & Pinto, 2014) or “go to the creation of innovations that would emerge anyways out of the current market logics” (Picone & Pauwels, 2013, p. 159). Second, our case study research focused on countries that already had general subsidies long before implementing innovation policies, potentially introducing a selection bias. Moreover, our analysis has been limited to

countries with (at the time of investigation) ongoing policies, overlooking those that may have encountered failure. Not least, our research focused solely on innovation policies for private media, excluding public service broadcasting. However, it may be worth considering how support for public service media might also prioritize innovation or, as highlighted in the literature, how regulatory language and principles surrounding PSBs could play a significant role in delivering industry-wide innovation solutions (Ofcom, 2024). Either way, broadening the scope to include a more diverse set of cases could provide valuable insights.

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