



Media and practitioners not always interested in the same topics

February 14, 2019 | Stephanie Schnydrig

Topics: Society

A study by environmental social scientist Mario Angst shows that reports in the media do not always reflect the issues that most concern organisations, public sector agencies, cantons and communities on a day-to-day basis.

Hardly a day went by in the summer of 2018 without a report on the continuing water scarcity at the time in Switzerland. Again and again, newspapers, radio and television were coming up with questions like: “How much water do nature, agriculture and people need?”, “How can we find ways to save water?” and “Which regions have the least water reserves?” On the other hand, Swiss municipal governments, cantons, engineering firms, NGOs and public sector agencies appear to be less concerned with the relationship between water scarcity and water-saving measures. This has been brought to light by a survey conducted by environmental social scientist Mario Angst, in which over 350 representatives from such organisations active in the water sector took part.

Mario Angst, who completed his PhD under Eawag group leader Manuel Fischer, took a look at which water-related topics were reported together in the media. At the same time, he also looked at whether these intersections were reflected in the activities of those working in the Swiss water sector. The research project was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

It is important that the relationships between topics, and not individual topics themselves are investigated. “The greatest social challenges of our time are actually ones in which numerous problems are intertwined, such as climate change or loss of biodiversity”, says Manuel Fischer.

Wading through 20,000 newspaper articles

Mario Angst used an archive of articles in the newspaper, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, for his media analysis. The challenge was to filter for articles that were relevant to his research question. “Flooding in countries outside Switzerland, or articles on lakeside hiking were of no interest to me, of course”, he explains. He therefore programmed an algorithm that would sift through over 20,000 newspaper articles and narrow them down to a few hundred. Out of these he then created a network that showed all of the juxtapositions of water-related topics in NZZ articles. He then compared the results with the network that emerged from the responses to the survey of practitioners in the field.

Invasive species and river revitalisation projects

“Some of the discrepancies were astonishing”, says Mario Angst. As mentioned in the example earlier, the connections made by the media between water scarcity and water-saving measures are everywhere. This is not the case in the water sector itself. Strategies and concepts do exist at the highest levels of government, but concrete measures at municipal or cantonal level for saving water in times of water scarcity have not (as yet) been put in place, with very few exceptions. Parallels are often drawn in the media between fracking and water pollution, while this is not the case in practice.

Conversely, the media are rarely interested in certain crossover points that have relevance to practitioners, such as invasive species that must be taken into consideration when regenerating rivers, for example. Or the link between agricultural inputs into the environment and pollution of groundwater.

“Media influence agenda setting”

“The discrepancies are quite natural” says Manuel Fischer, a political scientist based at Eawag. The media are often one step ahead, and they pick up on public fears a lot more quickly, he explains. A typical example of this is the debate around fracking: The topic has appeared in the media time and time again in connection with the pollution of drinking water. In practice, however, the parallel is rarely talked about, simply because there have been no fracking projects in Switzerland in recent years. “Perhaps also because it became very clear to the policy makers and industry that the population was so antagonistic towards fracking”, says Fischer.

The media are therefore very important when it comes to agenda setting. “If controversies and hot topics are dealt with in the media over and over – such as regional water shortages – the policy makers and practitioners are more likely to take steps to address them”, says Fischer. On the other hand, it is also completely understandable that the media rarely go for uncontroversial or abstract topics.

Manuel Fischer stresses that the study did not look at whether practitioners or the media are concerning themselves with irrelevant topics. Rather, the results of the study are important for future research projects. “In order to feel the pulse of Switzerland, it makes sense to conduct surveys in the field, as well as to undertake media analyses.”



The lines represent the linkages between different water-related topics in the media (left) and in the Swiss water sector. The different colours indicate various topic categories.

(Source: Mario Angst, 2019)

Original publication

```
.extbase-debugger-tree{position:relative}.extbase-debugger-tree input{position:absolute
!important;float: none !important;top:0;left:0;height:14px;width:14px;margin:0
!important;cursor:pointer;opacity:0;z-index:2}.extbase-debugger-tree input~.extbase-debug-
content{display:none}.extbase-debugger-tree .extbase-debug-header:before{position:relative;t
op:3px;content:"";padding:0;line-height:10px;height:12px;width:12px;text-align:center;margin:0
3px 0 0;background-image:url(
bmNvZGluZz0idXRmLTgiPz48c3ZnIHZlcnNpb249IjEuMSIgaWQ9IkViZW5lXzEiIHhtbG5zPSJ
odHRwOi8vd3d3LnczLm9yZy8yMDAwL3N2ZyIgeG1sbnM6eGxpbnM6Imh0dHA6Ly93d3d3Lm9yZy8y
Mub3JnLzE5OTkveGxpbnM6Imh0dHA6Ly93d3d3Lm9yZy8yMDAwL3N2ZyIgeG1sbnM6eGxpbnM6Imh0d
0eWxIPSJlbnFibGUtYmFja2dyb3VuZDpuZXcgMCAwIDEyIDYyOyIgeG1sbnM6eGxpbnM6Imh0dHA6Ly93
mVzZXJ2ZSI+PHN0eWxliHR5cGU9InRleHQvY3Nzlj4uc3Qwe2ZpbGw6IzgzODg4ODt9PC9z
dHlsZT48GF0aCBpZD0iQm9yZGVyYliBjGFz0ic3QwliBkPSJNMTEsMTFIMFYwaDEExVjEx
eiBNMTAsMUgxdjloOVYxeilvPjxnIGlkPSJJbm5lciI+PHJlY3QgeD0iMilgeT0iNSIyY2xhc3M9In
N0MCIgd2lkGg9ljiGhlaWdodD0iMSIvPjxyZWN0IHg9IjUuIiHk9ljiGhlaWdodD0iMSIvPjwvZz48L3N2Zz4=)}.extbase-
debugger-tree input:checked~.extbase-debug-content{display:inline}.extbase-debugger-tree input:checked~.
extbase-debug-header:before{background-image:url(
dmVyc2lvbj0iMS4wliBlbmNvZGluZz0idXRmLTgiPz48c3ZnIHZlcnNpb249IjEuMSIgaWQ9IkViZ
W5lXzEiIHhtbG5zPSJodHRwOi8vd3d3LnczLm9yZy8yMDAwL3N2ZyIgeG1sbnM6eGxpbnM6Imh0dHA6Ly93d3d3Lm9yZy8y
mh0dHA6Ly93d3d3Lm9yZy8yMDAwL3N2ZyIgeG1sbnM6eGxpbnM6Imh0dHA6Ly93d3d3Lm9yZy8y
SlwIDAgMTIiIHhtbG5zPSJlbnFibGUtYmFja2dyb3VuZDpuZXcgMCAwIDEyIDYyOyIgeG1sbnM6eGxpbnM6Imh0dHA6Ly93
1sOnNwYWNIPSIJwcmVzZXJ2ZSI+PHN0eWxliHR5cGU9InRleHQvY3Nzlj4uc3Qwe2ZpbGw6IzgzODg4ODt9PC9z
dHlsZT48GF0aCBpZD0iQm9yZGVyYliBjGFz0ic3QwliBkPSJNMTEsMTFIMFYwaDEExVjEx
TFIMFYwaDEExVjExeiBNMTAsMUgxdjloOVYxeilvPjxnIGlkPSJJbm5lciI+PHJlY3QgeD0iMilgeT
0iNSIyY2xhc3M9InN0MCIgd2lkGg9ljiGhlaWdodD0iMSIvPjwvZz48L3N2Zz4=)}.extbase-
debugger{display:block;text-align:left;background:#2a2a2a;border:1px solid #2a2a2a;box-
shadow:0 3px 0 rgba(0,0,0,.5);color:#000;margin:20px;overflow:hidden;border-radius:4px}.ext
base-debugger-floating{position:relative;z-index:999}.extbase-debugger-
top{background:#444;font-size:12px;font-family:monospace;color:#f1f1f1;padding:6px
15px}.extbase-debugger-center{padding:0 15px;margin:15px 0;background-image:repeating-
linear-gradient(to bottom,transparent 0,transparent 20px,#252525 20px,#252525
```

```

40px)}.extbase-debugger-center,.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-string,.extbase-
debugger-center a,.extbase-debugger-center p,.extbase-debugger-center pre,.extbase-
debugger-center strong{font-size:12px;font-weight:400;font-family:monospace;line-
height:20px;color:#f1f1f1}.extbase-debugger-center pre{background-color:transparent;margin:
0;padding:0;border:0;word-wrap:break-word;color:#999}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-
debug-string{color:#ce9178;white-space:normal}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
type{color:#569CD6;padding-right:4px}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
unregistered{background-color:#dce1e8}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
filtered,.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-proxy,.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-
debug-ptype,.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-visibility,.extbase-debugger-center
.extbase-debug-scope{color:#fff;font-size:10px;line-height:12px;padding:2px 4px;margin-
right:2px;position:relative;top:-1px}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
scope{background-color:#497AA2}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
ptype{background-color:#698747}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
visibility{background-color:#698747}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
dirty{background-color:#FFFFFFB6}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
filtered{background-color:#4F4F4F}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-seeabove{text-
decoration:none;font-style:italic}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
property{color:#f1f1f1}.extbase-debugger-center .extbase-debug-
closure{color:#9BA223;}Extbase Variable Dumparray(2 items) publications => '18280' (5
chars) libraryUrl => " (0 chars) Extbase Variable Dumparray(1 item) 0 =>
Snowflake\Publications\Domain\Model\Publicationprototypepersistent entity (uid=18280,
pid=124) originalId => protected18280 (integer) authors => protected'Angst,&nbsp;M.' (14
chars) title => protected'Networks of Swiss water governance issues. Studying fit between
media attent

```

```

ion and organizational activity' (107 chars) journal => protected'Society and Natural
Resources' (29 chars) year => protected2019 (integer) volume => protected32 (integer) issue
=> protected'12' (2 chars) startpage => protected'1416' (4 chars) otherpage =>
protected'1432' (4 chars) categories => protected'governance; media attention; networks;
Switzerland; water' (57 chars) description => protected'This study analyzes Swiss water
governance as a network of interrelated issu

```

```

es. It compares how organizations reflect relations between governance issue
s in their activity with the way issue relations are depicted by the media (
issue attention-activity fit). To do so, a media data analysis, supported by
machine learning, is combined with a nation-wide survey. Prominent areas of
misfit relate to the coordination between water saving measures and drought
risks; the exploitation of subterranean resources and drinking water protec
tion; and issues of micropollutants. The study demonstrates that comparing o
rganizational activity with media attention is particularly well suited to r
ecognize newly emerging, currently neglected areas of governance.' (749 chars)

```

```

serialnumber => protected'0894-1920' (9 chars) doi =>
protected'10.1080/08941920.2018.1535102' (29 chars) uid => protected18280 (integer)
_localizedUid => protected18280 (integer)modified _languageUid => protectedNULL
_versionedUid => protected18280 (integer)modified pid => protected124 (integer) Angst, M.
(2019) Networks of Swiss water governance issues. Studying fit between media attention and
organizational activity, Society and Natural Resources, 32(12), 1416-1432, doi:
10.1080/08941920.2018.1535102, Institutional Repository

```

Contact



Manuel Fischer

Department Head & Group Leader, Group: PEGO

Tel. +41 58 765 5676

manuel.fischer@eawag.ch

<https://www.eawag.ch/en/info/portal/news/news-archive/archive-detail/media-and-practitioners-not-always-interested-in-the-same-topics>