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The changing professional autonomy in journalism

According to various scholars, the room for professional judgment and individual effort has diminished in market-orientated newsrooms after the end of the 1900s (e.g. Weaver et al. 2007). This has undermined journalist's professional autonomy that for example Reich and Hanitzsch (2013) define as the latitude that a practitioner has in carrying out his or her occupational duties. It has been claimed that this kind of de-professionalization has also occurred in Nordic countries (Nygren 2008). In this paper we argue that the situation might not be that sinister. We made focused interviews with chief editors (N=10) and reporters (N=20) in ten Finnish newsrooms and conducted a survey (N=330) that targeted reporters in daily Finnish newspapers. The interviews were conducted in 2012 and the survey in 2013. The results show that journalists' own ideas are still valued in the newsrooms, and journalists can switch the angles of their stories, if this is deemed necessary. In the newsrooms, there seemed to be a strong consensus about the aims of the work. Stories were seldom shelved because of "wrong" opinions, and the journalists did not think that self-censorship was an issue. The paper also contributes theoretically to the discussions of journalist's professional autonomy by suggesting that re-interpreting the concept of professional autonomy in a more collective way explains why the journalists experienced more latitude in their work than was expected.