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Periodization Development of Tabloid Press in Czech Countries

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RESUMEN:

El texto se enfoca en el desarrollo de la prensa sensacionalista checa durante finales del siglo XIX y el inicio del siglo XX. El período de investigación corresponde a los años 1879-1939. El texto describe el carácter sociocultural de período estudiado, lo que llevó a la formación del primer periódico sensacionalista. El presente artículo describe los primeros tabloides checos, el desarrollo de este subgénero y su vigencia a través de un análisis cuantitativo y referencias históricas. Además del análisis de los títulos estudiados, se ofrece una visión integral de la cuestión de los tabloides checos, sus características y su inclusión en el ámbito de la cultura popular. El resultado es una periodización de sus etapas y sus peculiaridades. El objetivo final es el de catalogar un período ignorado de un subgénero ignorado y aproximarnos a sus principios.

Palabras clave: prensa sensacionalista, historia de la prensa sensacionalista, cultura popular, prensa sensacionalista checa, diario de tarde

ABSTRACT:

The paper focuses on the development of the Czech tabloid press at the end of the 19th and on the beginning of 20th century. The research period is from 1879 to 1939. Paper describes the socio-cultural character of studied period, which led to the formation of the first tabloid newspaper. The paper approaches the first Czech tabloids, its gradual development and emergence through quantitative analysis and historical references. In addition to the overall analysis of the monitored titles, paper offers a comprehensive look at the issue of Czech tabloid newspapers, its characteristics and its inclusion to the popular culture. The result is a periodization of stages of tabloid's development and its inclusion into historical context. The aim is to organize till ignored period of development of Czech tabloids and approach its beginnings.

Keywords: tabloid Press, history of tabloid Press, popular culture, Czech tabloid Press, evening paper

The formation of Tabloid Press occurred, according to many studies (Schudson, 1978: 23; Nerone, 1987: 384 -396; Altick, 1998: 81) due changes in various spheres of the society at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In order to allow newspapers to enter in a thriving business sector, it was necessary to precede fundamental changes in a whole structure of society.

The Czech Countries experience major changes at the turn of century though, not only in the industrial sector, but also in the constitutional arrangement. From the Austrian Empire, after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867), and two monarchies, Czech Countries were left in the hands of Austrian Monarchy, also called Cisleithania. At the time, Czech society echoed voices calling for national rights and national freedom, and with the establishment of the Czechoslovak State (1918), another step was taken towards a constitutional establishment and a new democratic path that did not obstruct the development of the newspaper industry.

1. RISE OF THE CZECH COUNTRIES AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURIES

In the period that gave space to the creation of the first tabloid newspapers, the Czech ambient dynamically changed in a cultural, economic, but also in a structural way. In 1860s, Bohemia led the emancipation of the bourgeoisie, although the emancipation of the working class was yet to come in the second half of the 19th century. The beginning of the 20th century is again marked by a gradual transition to a post-industrial society with the development of communicative third-sector groups and a quaternary-sector (Macháčová; Matěječek, 2002: 56). The last one is characterized by the emergence of a democratic and developed society. This period is also relevant in terms of industrialization and urbanization. Prague, the capital, had 102,000 inhabitants in 1830, a hundred years later, 942,000 (Horská; Maur; Musil; 2003: 197). For the first time, the number of inhabitants of the Czech Countries exceeded five million in 1820, and ten million achieved in 1909 (Horská, 1996: 197). Overall, the population of the Czech Countries during the 19th century roughly doubled. In comparison, the total population of the United Kingdom between the years 1750-1850 tripled. Czech historian Otto Urban analyses in his study the complex structure of the Czech society in this period, which consisted of representatives of the working class, the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois layers in a ratio of

50:40:10 (Urban, 2003: 133). The nobility lost a strong position due to the rise of this new class, as well as businessmen and manufacturers. However, they began to copy the style of this repressed aristocratic class. Changes in all fields of society led to a shift from typical rural families to urban predominant types, especially during the second half of the century. While in 1869, about 61% of the working class worked in farms, agriculture decreased to 42% in 1910, and the industrial sector (33%) increased to 41% (Horská, 1996: 59). At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the formation of new social relations culminated, becoming an essential pillar of this new democratic society. This country, which represented an industrial-agrarian society, received a higher status in Europe, due to the industrialization and urbanization which favored new conditions and a new atmosphere opened towards a new cultural practice.

The second half of the 19th century brought, however, an increase of the middle class. The so-called post-revolution also signified an escalation in the number of doctors and lawyers – official records in 1869 prove a rise by almost 2.5 times. In further years, the progress of the Czech nation grew even faster. In fact, the last two decades before the World War I are considered the most economically successful period in the whole Czech modern history. Building a strong electrical and locomotive industry -motorcycles, cars and the first attempts to construct airplanes - Czechs proved they had one of the most technically advanced nations of Europe at the time (Pokorný, 1996: 14). Urbanization and industrialization, then, led to a new controversial perspective on environmental issues. Fixed working hours, the consolidation of the education system and new spare time habits led to the appearance of a new type of reader, who consumed not only first tabloid newspapers, trashy novels, and “penny press” with a clear indoctrination aim, but also participated in many cultural associations. Overall, the modernization of Czech society due to the industrialization process, the demographic revolution, also in terms of urbanization, or the democratization and the secularization of civil society are the core of these changes. Those dynamic changes also started the birth and development of tabloids in Czech Countries.

2. METHODOLOGY

The object of investigation is essentially Czech tabloid newspapers until 1939,

including its predecessors and varieties of new Journalism (for instance, the first working class newspaper, sold at an unbeatable price). This research is framed within the term tabloid paper, containing the following features: low price, mass circulation and readership, light content (light news with different structure, particularly based on humanistic interests), street sale, and the use of new technologies. Specifically, under review are newspapers, which we found in professional publications, mentioned as low-quality papers, working class publications or so-called sensationalistic publications. The methodology followed is based on several criteria established in Pierre Bourdieu's criticism (Bourdieu, 2010: 282), which recommends a three level analysis: field position within power, together with mutual development analyses in time:

1. The development in Czech tabloid newspapers compared to the status quo in society, and its disruption and response to such disturbance (reaction against tabloids in contemporary periodicals, monographs, and archives).
2. The internal structure within the field; a quantitative content analysis of individual titles and its comparison.
3. Analysis of the "habitus" of those who are interested in the specific context of this field position – in other words, analysis of judicial processes (subject matter, quantity of trials), editorial statements about tabloids, with special emphasis on readers (correspondence, advertising).

Content analysis of newspapers will be followed by a quantitative analysis using selected data (material extracted from two weeks, in two different years, for each journal). Quantitative analysis has been subjected to content and advertising independently. Before proceeding to the analysis, we should bear in mind two hypotheses. Firstly, the development of Czech tabloid newspapers was inspired in the development of this type of subgenres in neighboring states, and secondly, the tabloidization process occurred gradually – the most scandalous papers were based after the initial years of the First Republic –.

3. RESULTS

Due to the space limitations of an academic article, a brief description and comparison of the studied newspapers is proposed below. An in-depth analysis of the following

material can be found in a dissertation, where terminology and further tabloid features are discussed (Dorčáková, 2014). Below different stages are presented, as well as further information about examined newspapers and its characteristics. On the basis of the following studied materials, a periodization of tabloids is proposed:

1. Illustrated Newspapers (1879-1914) (Into this category fall newspapers with the term illustrated in their title, the first page always shows illustrations, and its focus is not comic but social).
2. Political penny Newspaper, midstage of party Tabloid Newspapers (1874-1912).
3. First Tabloid Evening Newspaper (1912-1925).
4. Spread of Tabloid Newspapers in First Republic (1926-1939).

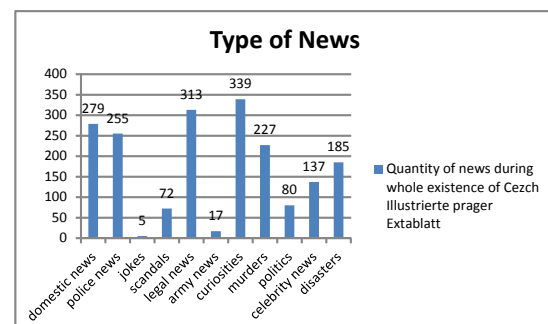
First and second stages, however, are overlapped and eventually inspired and gave rise to the first cheap evening newspaper, with different content if they are compared to its evening antecessors. Let us introduce stages more individually:

Illustrated Papers

Illustrated newspapers became very popular readings in the late 19th century. With the appearance of first illustrated papers, the first tabloid followed soon.

Illustrierte Prager Extrablatt

The first Czech-area illustrated newspaper was the *Illustriertes Prager Extrablatt* (1879- 1881), with a Czech supplement (1880), which as the name implies, is inspired in its predecessor *Illustrierte Wiener Extrablatt*. Quantitative analysis shows that the content mainly consisted in accidents, scandals, and trials, becoming this information 77% of all periodicals (Dorčáková, 2010: 67). For further analysis, please refer to Dorčáková (2010).



Graph 1: News in *Illustrierte Prager Extrablatt* (Dorčáková, 2010)

In the newspaper, tabloid-news content dominated and titles did not belong to any particular political party, but its duration

was short, possibly due to the readers' disinterest and the lack of a specific target audience. *Illustrierte Prager Extrablatt* brought to this new market a revival in terms of editorial development, with large illustrations on their covers, but could not find its readers. Circulation decreased from an announced 6,000 copies to 1,200. See below contrasted data about the situation at the Prague editorial market in the 1890s.

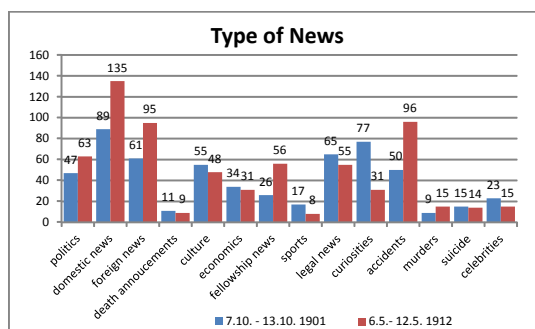
Table 1: Circulation of Prague's daily press in 1885

Significant newspapers in 1885 in Czech Countries	Copies	Price
<i>Národní listy</i>	9,774	5 gr.
<i>Národní politika</i>	8,000	2 gr.
<i>Illustrierte Prager Extrablatt</i>	6,000	3 gr.

Source: Bibliography newspapers in Bohemia (Roubík, 1930)

Pražský ilustrovaný kurýř

Another illustrated newspaper was *Pražský Ilustrovaný kurýř*, which started as a supplement of the daily publication *Hlas Národa* and after two years was reborn as a diary from 1895 to 1914. At this stage, newspapers became National Party propaganda, although non-political news dominated. Political news was particularly found in the already mentioned *Hlas Národa*. Its informative and cultural style soon gained popularity within readers. According to advertising catalogues, *Pražský Ilustrovaný kurýř* circulated 26,000 copies in 1900, and 20,000 copies in 1914. *Národní listy*, however, at the end of the millennium circulated 17,000, and 28,000 in 1914 (Dukes, 1914; Haasenstein a Vogler, 1900 qtd. in Machek, 2013: 86).



Graph 2: News in Pražský Ilustrovaný Kurýř

In both studied years, the content was mostly devoted to national news in 1906, soon followed by curiosities and accidents. In 1912, the pendulum swung back and the first two positions were filled by domestic

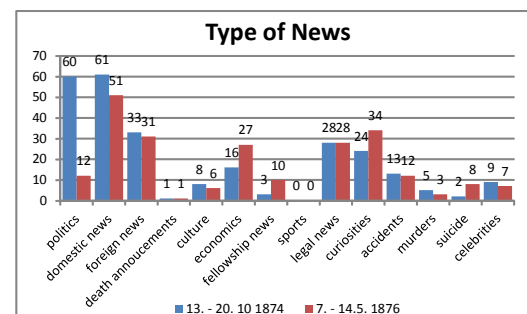
and foreign news. Significantly, there was an increase in police reports, primarily associated with the spread of parliamentary proceedings, and finally accidents closely followed by political news. Substantive changes are also confirmed by Jakub Machek's research in his doctoral thesis (2013). *Pražský ilustrovaný kurýř* gained readership and remained in the market during nineteen years. High circulation was consolidated for fifteen years, but in the end, the number of copies sharply declined. A declining circulation and the plummeting numbers in advertising (almost 50% in the studied period) were indicative of severe financial problems, in addition to the political change experience at the time. *Pražský Ilustrovaný Kurýř* had to come to an end.

Penny newspapers

With the advent of new printing techniques and the boom of press circulation, political parties understood this as a new opportunity to reach more potential voters. Thus, cheap politically-oriented newspapers began to appear in 1890s, complementing their content with typically gutter press news. However, these publications could not be essentially considered tabloids; they were in an intermediate sphere, until parties came to the realization that tabloid content could significantly increase circulation and reach more readers. As a consequence, forty years later, there was a clear diversification of content and editorial issues in these publications.

Brousek

One of the more successful newspapers was *Brousek*, which was initially published in 13th September 1874, costing two pennies. Let us look at the quantitative analysis of the two studied periods. At best, it appears that *Brousek* was devoted to political, domestic and foreign news, more than to entertainment.

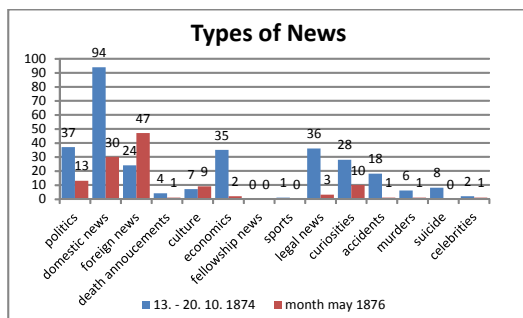


Graph 3: News in Brousek

Obrana

Obrana newspaper (1874-1876) was created as *Brousek's* competitor, offering the same concept; cheap partisan newspapers with diversified content. The duration

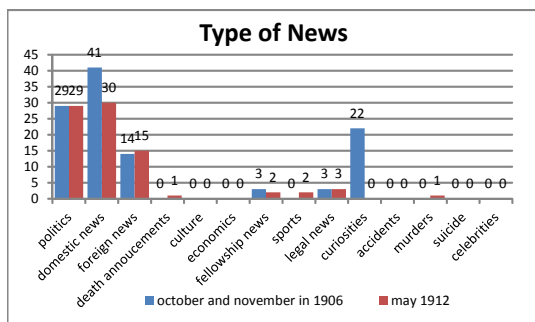
was shorter but, probably found readers, or a generous donor. The first issue was published 30th September 1874, two weeks later than *Brousek*. Its subtitle proclaimed "simplest political newspaper struggling for the rights of the people, for the right country, enlightenment and freedom". In their first issue, *Obrana* stated "*Obrana* will be a faithful and loyal supporter of Bohemian people, it will defend compatriots against injustice." (*Obrana*, 1874: 1). Its price was also 2 pennies and it was daily published, except Mondays, and later on, only as a weekly magazine. In August 1876, publishers stopped printing. Quantitative analysis shows that *Obrana* had similar content distribution as *Brousek*.



Graph 4: News in *Obrana*

Lid

The first penny biweekly magazine, later weekly, became the National Socialist newspaper. Interesting enough Jiří Stříbrný, who worked in this publication for two years, later created *Tempo*, one of the most famous Czech tabloid newspapers, a publication which exceeded notionally insurmountable boundaries. *Lid's* target was lower working class, becoming the mouthpiece of National Socialist party, even openly publishing letters from party members. Content cannot be specifically considered sensationalist:



Graph 5: News in *Lid*

This short period can be mistakenly associated with the success of penny press in the United States and the United Kingdom. Although Czech penny newspapers shared some similar features such as price, and

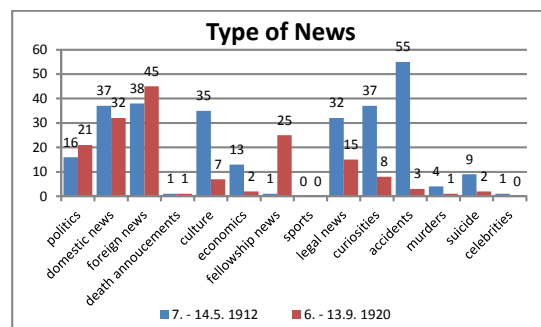
sometimes content with English speaking country penny publications - scandals, sensationalist stories - we can also confirm that those papers were predecessors of Czech tabloid newspapers closely linked to political parties, who lowered price and marketed towards a greater audience by means of tabloidization.

Austro-Hungary Evening papers

The era of Czech Evening papers has often been associated to a specific period, 1920s and 1930s. The first evening papers in Czech Countries appeared before the First World War. *České slovo* newspaper (1912) kept its stable place on the market besides the later consolidation of *Tempo*. *České slovo* was able to maintain the circulation, though their biggest expansion takes place during late 1920s. This Austria-Hungarian publication was sold in the streets and particularly addressed working class people returning from work in the evening, offering alternative and easy-to-read news. All the evening papers tracked in this section were originally founded during the First Republic.

Večerník Práva lidu

Socials Democrats began issuing *Večerník Práva lidu* on January 1912. From the beginning, this four-page publication cost 20 cents. In the early years of its existence, it gained readership, circulating from 87,000 to 112,000 copies per issue which, at that time, is an unprecedented number (Dolejší, 1963: 30).



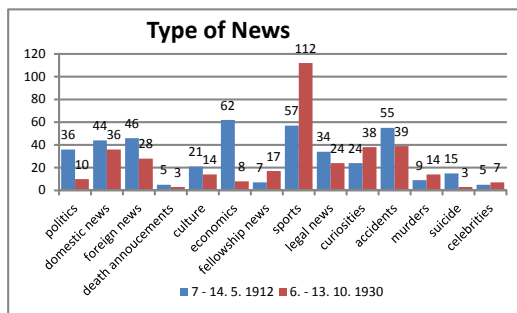
Graph 6: News in *Večerník Práva lidu*

Večerník Práva lidu was one of the first evening newspapers, which offered alongside a political agenda and tabloid reports. Sold at a low price, it became a solid alternative to morning papers. Despite moderate content, it had a high circulation and abundant advertising.

Večerník České slovo

České slovo - Večerní list, later renamed *Večerní České slovo*, debuted 2nd January 1912 on the market, one day after *Večerník Práva lidu*. With a price

set in 2 pennies, *Večerník České Slovo* became the most widely expanded pre-war newspaper in Czechoslovakia. In Bohemia and Moravia, its sister publication *Moravské slovo a Ostravské České slovo* was also consolidated, but after six year of existence, *Večerník České slovo* circulation was already about 100,000 copies, with 648,000 copies sold at best (NA, PŘ II – OD, folder 306, signature: Tisk 235/1 *Večerník České slovo*: 188). Compared to morning paper *České slovo* with a circulation around 20,000 copies (Dolejší, 1963: 77), the success of this evening paper was based on a system “for individual mutations” which allowed a rapid spread through all Czechoslovak Republic, where it was shipped. Other publishing houses also implemented this system years later. *Večerník České Slovo* could be apparently considered as a British *The Daily Mail* version. Quantitative analysis shows that *Večerník* mainly focused on domestic news, economy, sports, foreign news, and a sensationalist editorial policy. *Večerník České slovo* became the most popular evening newspaper in the 1920s.



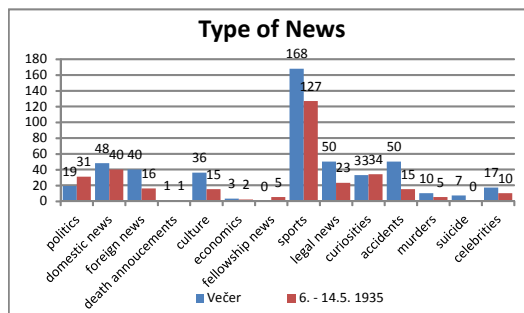
Graph 7: News in *Večerník Českého slova*

Večer

The last of the evening paper discussed here, arose during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. *Večer* with subtitle *lidový deník* – popular diary, issued its first number the 14th August 1914 and cost 2 pennies. This evening paper was complemented with propaganda of the Agrarian Party, together with its morning paper *Venkov*. Although it was especially created for Prague, it was delivered in the mornings on the countryside, where it gained significant popularity (Raus, 1965: 61). While the official morning paper *Venkov* was designed for a relatively narrow readership, the People’s Daily *Večer* in Prague was a true folk publication with adapted content. *Večer* had sententious headlines and short easy-to-read news (128). Quantitative analyses show the tabloid themes were numerous. *Večer* competed with *Večerník České Slovo* in covering sports news and individual events. It published Czech and

world sports results, especially football, and also informed about other sports, provided detailed coverage of matches, offering readers freshly reports about players. This newspaper coined the slogan: “All round sportsman reads *Večer* daily” (*Večer*, 18. 1. 1935, Vol. 17, No. 15: 2). Sunday afternoon newspapers issued special sports editions. It was a one-sided poster, with all the weekend result. The issue cost 20 cents.

Relevant as well was its cultural section, compared to *Večerník České slovo* and *Večerník Práva lidu*, which took a different perspective. This journal did not paid attention only to theaters’ programs, but they also brought the front box of the screen and behind the scenes. In addition to this information, they also added relevant data on tours and new theatrical repertoire on events at Barrandov and international celebrities: “A well-known brands of MGM lion died. In animal farm in Philadelphia died at the age of 20 years famous lion LOO, whose appearance and voice knew the world of brands MGM films.” (literal translation, *Večer*, 09/05/1935, Vol , 17, no. 108 : 3).



Graph 8: News in *Večer*

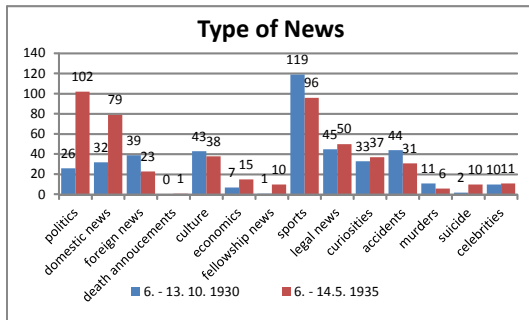
We introduced three cheap evening papers that have gained popularity among the masses and which were reinstated after the World War I hiatus. In comparison with earlier penny political diaries, they brought sensationalist content, inspired by western neighbors. Evening News did not abandon, however, policy news, but since then it turned into a news slander publication with sensationalist headlines.

First republic tabloid newspaper

With the establishment of new own state Czechoslovakian Republic (1918), which proclaimed democratic principles and released press laws, the place for continued development of mass newspapers was created. The main actors of this time have become publishers *Melantrich* and *Tempo*. The period was marked by mass circulation, crossing ethical boundaries and typical multiple releases of issues per day.

Polední list

The first *Tempo's* newspaper *Polední list* entered the market in 1926. Newspapers were sold for 20 pennies and, in 1935, for 30 pennies. The last issue was published 6th May 1945. *Polední list* changed its name three times in a week, although being always the same newspaper. When we look at quantitative analysis, we find that here sports dominated, which in the case of important matches we front cover. In 1930s, tabloid reports predominated in content.



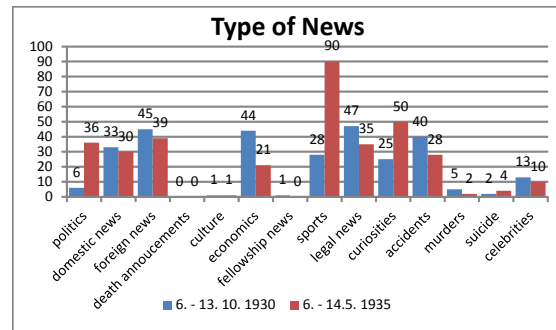
Graph 9: News in *Polední list*

Editorial methods were considered as follows... "Tempo's journalists are known as the fraudsters and racketeers, which sided journalists from another quality paper" (Dolejší, 1963: 159). Unfair methods were also used on the advertising department. Advertisers paid for the whole circulation of the issue, but these were only present in the Prague edition. In Greater Prague editions the advertisement was not allocated and the publisher usually saved the place, and hence the cost of production (Tomášek, 1930: 1-30).

Expres

Expres became a widely spread evening newspaper, edited on pink paper with a price of 30 cents and with four pages. *Expres* was published from Monday to Saturday. The main readers of this newspaper were men. These four pages were not strictly divided in newspaper column, and brought messages from all over the world, often scandalous, political affairs and curiosity. There were also good graphic layouts and frequent visual material. The newspaper had also an extensive economic section. The quantitative analysis shows that the evening *Expres* brought sports, as well as economic news, but the main content in number and space were political or private scandals, entertainment stories, unbelievable disasters and accidents. As an example, "Lida Baarová divorces Gustav Fröhlich" (*Expres*, Vol. VIII, n. 194, 26.08.1935: 2) or: "The Three Series Act: Three tragic deaths in the family." (*Expres*, Vol. VIII, n. 194, 08.26.1935: 1).

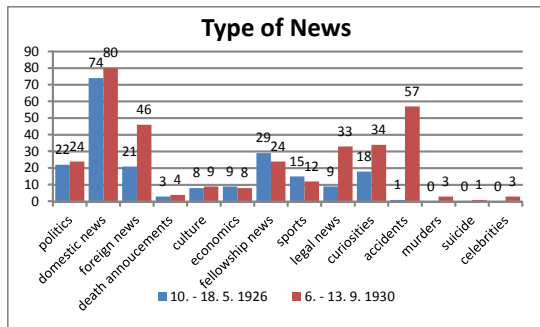
In terms of quantitative analysis, *Expres* was, from all studied newspaper, the most scandalous one. These results are confirmed by the newspapers file kept by the Police archive. Censorship and subsequent seizure were rampant.



Graph 10: News in *Expres*

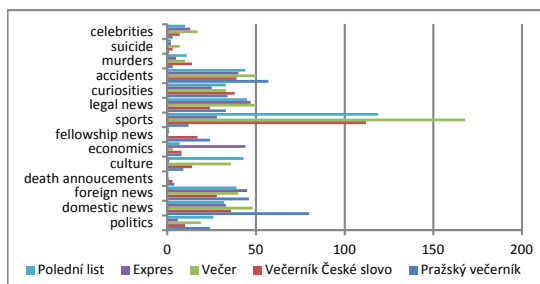
Pražský večerník

Pražský večerník (1919 -1934) started on four small pages and initially nobody would say have said that this publication would have been in future competitor of other tabloid papers. From the beginning, content was conservative-based, and based on domestic and foreign news, defending the clerical positions of Czechoslovak People's Party. The first three pages formed a mixture of news, and sports and, the fourth one mainly advertising. In the newspaper we could find many curiosities: "Three tigers as wedding witnesses. Wedding with tigers in a cage. From America, there is a picture that is sensational as everything that America sends to the Old World. Tiger tamer Eugene Scott has married, nothing strange, such as millions of men do [...] Young tamer marries in a cage in the presence of three Bengali tigers..." (*Pražský večerník*, 9/10/1930, Vol .12, no. 208: 3) In the second studied period in 1930, the diary changed its format, as well as its layout, becoming more dynamic, and extended to six pages, remaining four on Mondays. Front cover again brought world news, and on the other hand, we could also find messages, jobs offers, or information about Christian life in their third page. Next pages reported cinemas, theaters, radio and advertising. Fifth pages again used to set world news, and sometimes legal news. Advertising dominated back covers. This newspaper thus did not adapt to the trend of placing sport news in their last page.



Graph 11: News in *Pražský večerník*

After analyzing these newspapers both two predicted hypotheses are confirmed. Czech tabloid newspapers were mainly inspired by foreign neighbor publications; contemporary succession (Illustrated Newspaper initially set in Vienna) and the style similarity of the First republic's evening papers with *The Daily Mail* are clear. Quantitative analysis shows that the tabloidization was gradual, specially taking into account the most sensationalist newspapers, published under *Tempo* auspices (see table below).



Graph 12: News in *Pražský večerník*, *Večerník České slovo*, *Večer*, *Expres* and *Pondělní list* in 6. - 13. 10. 1930

Finally, quantitative content information about the circulation of studied newspapers and quality newspapers is added:

Name	Year 1927	Year 1929
<i>Národní Politika</i>	140 00 / 335 000	138 000
<i>Rudé právo</i>	54 000/ 78 000	110 000
<i>Lidové listy</i>	28 000	36 000
<i>Pondělní list a Večerní list</i>	55 000	10 000 + 52 000
<i>Večerní České slovo</i>	218 000	300 000 310 000 on Sundays
<i>Večerník Práva lidu</i>	85 000	118 000
<i>Večer</i>	48 000	60 000
<i>Expres</i>		35 000
<i>Pražský večerník</i>	8 500	11 000

Table 3: Newspapers Circulation according to Mosse's Advertising catalogue (1927-1929)

The above table shows that newspaper publisher *Tempo* did not have the biggest extension, but according to contemporary debates in the press, disillusionment aroused among the most widely spread evening papers *Večerníky České slovo*, *Večerník práva lidu* and *Večer*. This confirms the fact that the Czech newspaper readers did not select a newspaper according to other criteria than party affiliation. Among the serious variants of morning papers and parties' evening tabloid newspapers, readers favored their tabloid versions. The circulation of these publications correlates with the results in the Election of 1929, since the most popular newspaper was also supported by the biggest political parties.

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