

**Special Session on remembering Denis McQuail at IAMCR Conference in Eugene, Oregon
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Kaarle Nordenstreng: News and journalism – still central in the middle of all theorizing

Denis was ten years old when the war ended. That is the age when kids typically begin to reach out to the wider world beyond the immediate environment of home and personal experiences. However, as a child of the stressful war years, Denis was naturally well aware of the wider world throughout his early childhood with radio and newspapers as vital windows to the political and social realities beyond home and school. The postwar years as he approached adulthood were full of turmoil, both in national politics in Britain and in world politics, focusing first on Germany and France and then on the Korean War with the looming Cold War as an overall context. For all British youngsters this was a natural extension of school education, but for Denis the world around him became an integral part of his existential being, his way of thinking and his worldview.

This is the ground which fed the desire of this man to make sense of a fragmented reality and the burning need we perceive in him to build theoretical frameworks to understand various phenomena in the world. And it is natural that the media – print, electronic and hence journalism – became pivotal in his worldview – not only its professional and academic extensions but its very foundations.

Consequently, news and journalism are very much present in McQuail's Mass Communication Theory – not prominent in its overall profile but built into his paradigmatic thinking. Moreover, one aspect of news and journalism has a central place in his Theory, namely responsibility. Freedom for Denis was always inseparable from responsibility and he went to great lengths to elaborate the concept of accountability. Responsibility is an integral part of what we could call the ethical nature of Denis – something that is characteristic of all his academic production and also of him as a person. This aspect of his thinking was stimulated by the postwar debate in the UK launched by the report of the Royal Commission on the Press, which Denis later recalled as one of the main points of reference of his thinking, both as an academic and a citizen.

With such a background Denis was no stranger in a self-appointed group of Soul Brothers who in the late 1980s began to work towards a book on the normative theories of the media – with Cliff Christians, Ted Glasser, Bob White and myself. Each of us combined an interest in journalism with a broader ambition to articulate the role of media in society, as highlighted by the subtitle of our final product in 2009: *Journalism in Democratic Societies*.

Strictly speaking, Denis never worked as a journalist; his approach to the topic was purely theoretical. In fact, during his stay as visiting professor in Tampere in fall 1974, he was invited by the editor of our local newspaper, the second largest in Finland, to see the editorial office and meet its working journalists. Coming back to the university after a long excursion, he was excited but also a bit abashed, telling to me in his typically humble and honest way that it was the first time he had ever visited a newspaper. Later, in Leicester, during the IAMCR Conference in 1976, a visit was again arranged for interested participants to the local provincial newspaper there. Denis joined the group and according to Ted Glasser, who was also there as a young scholar, Denis admitted that it was the first editorial office in the UK he ever visited.

With all the anecdotal additions, Denis remains for us a unique role model as I put it in the photo album compiled for his funeral. (See <http://www.uta.fi/cmt/tiedostot/Denis-photo-album.pdf>)