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THE STUDIES THAT CHANGE, THE RULES THAT SHOULD STAY THE SAME (BUT HAVE NOT). CURRICULA OF JOURNALISM STUDIES AT JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY: IDEAS, PRACTICALITIES, STUDENTS AND MEDIA MARKET

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the composition, together with education and social premises, of the first official standard curriculum for Polish journalism studies formulated in 2000. It describes the evolution of the programs and pragmatics of journalist education in Poland in the last 25 years in relation to the media market tendencies, the changing concept of university, and international trends in journalism education.

Keywords: journalism profession, media market, social accountability of media, role of university, education

As the Institute of Journalism, Media, and Social Communication at Jagiellonian University celebrates the 25th anniversary of its existence, I have been asked to reflect upon the changes in journalism studies at the JU. I've had the honour to discuss and compare my experiences with Professor Wayne Wanta, whose paper on the challenges of teaching journalism within the American context can be read in the current issue of The Media Research Issues. The reason for our encounter has been that not only have I been working at JU for over 30 years, always within the frame of communication, media, and journalism education and research, but

I was also the co-author of the first official basic curriculum of the journalism and social communication studies at Polish universities after the systemic change of 1989. The curriculum was accepted in the year 2000 by the Main Council of Higher Education as a template for the academic institutions teaching journalism in Poland in the first decade of the 21st century. What kind of programme was it? How has it evolved since then? What values and ways of thinking about media and journalists has it reflected? What are the differences between what we were teaching 25 years ago – and today?

The Context

Before the systemic change of 1989, journalism studies on the academic level in Poland did not have separate educational autonomy. They could have been organised as a part of philological or pedagogy studies. It was, for example, possible to study journalism as a separate specialist course attached to the Polish literature studies at the universities, or to the literature teaching in pedagogical colleges. More frequently though, journalism and media studies would have been attached to the political science studies. The political science journalism programmes were longer and more comprehensive, therefore more students were trying to get into the profession through political science than those studying within the framework of literature studies. At Jagiellonian University in the eighties one needed to start as a political science student and then – usually during the third year – some students would have been admitted to the two and a half years journalism unit. The admission would have been based on their mark score during the first five semesters and the assessment of the two obligatory summer internships in editorial offices of their choice. This was how I studied journalism. The competition was stiff, as most students would start political science only with journalism studies in mind, and there were never enough places.

There were no separate communication studies or media studies in the structure of the academic field in Poland even though the media research institutions, like Cracow's Press Research Centre, were fully functioning at that time. Some researchers attached to those institutions would teach media research or journalism courses at the universities.

The road to the profession through the journalism programmes being part of political science was probably a contributing factor to the assumptions about journalism education as being in a necessary way associated with political indoctrination. The journalist profession in the real socialist system indeed had a highly political character. At the end of the '70s, almost every other journalist in Poland was a member of the ruling PZPR party (Szot 2009, p. 467). Still, the image of media and communication studies at that time as being uniformly politically biased and propaganda-oriented is oversimplified and not altogether accurate.

It has to be added that journalism studies were not the most typical gateway to the profession. The journalists I knew at the time were the graduates of various studies

ranging from literature, through medicine, to engineering. Many had no higher education at all, due to the prevailing assumption in the media outlets that journalism can only be taught hands-on, and the success of a journalist is a result of a set of special talents and capacities, while too much education can even "spoil the talent".

Systemic Transition and Two Challenges to Academic Journalism and Media Studies

After the year 1989, we were tasked with the construction of "new" journalism studies from scratch, with relatively meagre resources, and building communication and media studies in Poland as a self-sufficient (even if highly interdisciplinary) academic discipline. The former was more urgent, the latter took more years, as – because of the political associations of journalism studies before 1989 – we went through the phase when communication and media studies as academic discipline were officially scraped from the system. This would have created a contradictory internal situation within the academia. There were communication, media research, and journalism programmes, and there were researchers and research projects. In the year 2007 the Polish Communication Association was established as the representation of the entire media and communication researchers' community, but it was not possible to have a legally issued MA, PhD or habilitation diploma in media and communication research.[1] Only in 2018 was the science of social communication and media introduced to the list of academic disciplines in Poland, largely due to the concerted efforts of PCA and the entire community of media researchers working at various Polish academic institutions.

As the unit conducting the journalism studies at Jagiellonian University, after 1989 we went through various technical and legal solutions. We were a part of the Department of Law, in the frame of the Institute of Political Science; then, the independent (outside of department structure) International Journalism School; finally – the Institute of Journalism and Social Communication (later: the Institute of Journalism, Media, and Social Communication) within the structure of the Department of Management and Social Communication.

In the year 2000, we were tasked with the construction of the basic curriculum for journalism studies that were then being created in many academic institutions in Poland,

[1] My paradoxical situation, for example, was that while my PhD project would concern semiotics of television, my PhD diploma has been issued by the Law Faculty – in political science. Then, after a few years of media research and writing a few books, including a large monograph on media uses among the Polish middle class, I obtained a habilitation diploma in art sciences.

meeting the enormous interest of prospective students.[2] As one of my colleagues points out (Kaliszewski 2020, p. 126), the journalism studies were viewed as "soft" (i.e. not requiring assiduous work) and "trendy", and our students would praise the friendly and creative atmosphere of the didactic processes. Journalism itself was then perceived as a profitable, prestigious profession, while also as one based rather on talent than on practical craft and technical prowess. Setting the minimum standard was important because the "trendiness" of journalism studies led to the creation – in the first decade of the 21st century – of a plethora of various academic and non-academic journalism schools and courses, including schools and centres operated not only by universities public and private, but also by editorial offices, professional associations (Association of Polish Journalists, Association of the Journalists of the Republic of Poland, Association of the Journalists of the Catholic Press), and foreign press syndicates (Passauer Neue Presse, Bauer Group, Axel Springer et al.). The courses were offered not only to university students but also to secondary school students and graduates and to seasoned professional journalists willing to complete their education (see Jakubowicz 2009, p. 267). In the first decade of the 21st century, most journalists in Poland had some form of higher education background, but only a minority in journalism and/or media studies (Stępińska, Ossowski 2011, p. 19). The changes were quick, but in 2013 there were still about 40 per cent of journalists not having any background in the journalism or media study domain (Dobek-Ostrowska, Barczyszyn, Michel 2013, p. 15).

The Basic Premises of the New Journalism Programme

I can see today that the new, 5-year minimum curriculum for the university journalism studies, constructed after a long series of discussions and consultations, was a result of the uneasy compromise between our idea of the mission of the university and the quixotic concept of the role of a journalist in a democratic society – and financial constraints and deficiency of the existing technical infrastructure. We were abiding by the definition of journalism, somewhat idealistically delineated by Stanisław Mocek researching the situation of journalism after the collapse of the system (Mocek 2006, p. 27) as the profession consisting in gathering, selection, elaboration and distribution of information and commentaries in a way that makes them not only well crafted professionally but also dependable and intellectually inspiring.

Our minimum curriculum for journalism studies at that time was based on the assumption about the importance of language and writing skills. We aimed

[2] The admittance ratio at the International Journalism School at JU at that time could have reached about 40:1. Thus the entrance procedures calling for a protracted and painstaking selection process, including the two-fold (language / general knowledge about public life) written exam and the assessment of the candidates' own body of journalism work prior to applying to the programme.

at teaching to write, most of all. Writing was constructed in a programme as the most important skill, and perceived as the basis not just for press journalism, but also for the work for broadcasting and TV. Thus, the compulsory basic and advanced writing workshops, the units devoted to various press genres, and the courses in stylistics and the cultivation of language. This was a correlate of actual enormous political and cultural importance of the printed press, both dailies and opinion magazines, at that time in Poland. On the other hand, it was also dictated by the specific material situation of journalism studies. Most academic establishments would be able to teach students to write very well but did not have too much professional equipment to teach them the technical skills necessary for the work in, for example, television or radio broadcasting. This is why the students were meant to learn these kinds of skills during their internships in professional media. Therefore, the minimum programme called for obligatory summer internships for all students, depending on where they wanted to go to work – whether in press, radio, or television. It has to be granted that, at least at the Jagiellonian University, we would also obtain much help from the local press, TV and broadcasting outlets, allowing us to use their facilities free of charge for the purpose of training the young adepts of the profession. These open and helpful attitudes were later to change in the process of progressing commercialisation of attitudes and economic competition among the national and local media.

General Knowledge Base

The set of courses, particularly at the introductory level, was aimed at the strong humanities and social studies formation. Students were to be offered the full courses of philosophy, economy, sociology, pedagogy, political science, contemporary history, communication theories, cultural theory, modern and contemporary literature, history of world media and Polish media. We were very ambitious in this respect, aiming to prepare students to be well intellectually equipped for understanding the world from a wider perspective and for working in any intellectually demanding environment.

Awareness and responsibility

Seeing the programme from afar, I can tell that we seemed to be trying to create a strong awareness among the students of the importance and influence of media on society on many levels. The curriculum called for courses in press law, but also obligatory courses on the social and cultural influence of media. Then, there was a significant, but also problematic question of the relationship between journalism and politics. On one hand, we were aware of journalism studies being too entangled with political propaganda during communist times; it called for the introduction of the obligatory ethics course. On the other hand, as a result of a history

of communication and journalism studies at Polish universities, most media and communication scholars were more or less attached to political studies anyway. Until today, the composition of the media and social communication field in Polish academia is shaped by this political science pedigree. The studies aimed to put the specifics of Polish academia to good use while, in a way, re-balance the set of subjects and topics. Therefore, the program called for units on political science, political systems, both Polish and international, media systems, and political communication, while emphasizing humanities too.

All in all, our curriculum was then based on the bi-fold concept of journalism education: "teaching *of* journalism and teaching *about* journalism (…). While the teaching of journalism comprises the skills necessary for news production, the teaching about journalism contextualizes those skills and gives them meaning" (Kirchhoff 2021, p. 112).

Practical Aspects

We were aware of the attitudes of the journalism profession towards university studies as being "too scholarly" and theoretical. At that time it was important to avoid giving journalism studies an overly academic nature. Therefore, despite the limited resources that then were the lot of most academic institutions in Poland, a strong emphasis was put on practical workshops. This in most cases resulted in an invitation extended to professional journalists to conduct practical courses for the students. Besides obligatory internships, the ongoing cooperation of the students with the professional media outfits was strongly supported. It all led to the particular composition of teaching staff in most journalism education institutions then: the studies were conducted by academics and journalists, co-operating. Some of the latter went on to complete their academic degrees at the PhD level.

Changing Landscape, Evolving Interests

There was already a growing awareness at that point of the ever-expanding field of media-related professions and institutions. Therefore, the actual formulation of the graduate's portrait (the model description of which was required by the Ministry of Higher Education from any education institution opening a journalism course) would not describe the graduate equipped with the journalism skills only; rather, the person ready for various media-related professions. There was the possibility embedded in the programme to fork a certain point, to allow the specialisation among the students gradually more and more interested in public relations, public opinion research, and (increasingly more attractive for the students as a career possibility) advertising and marketing communication.

The Evolution Factors

The programmes of journalism studies at Polish academia had to evolve over the years. In the next decade, we had to start preparing students for being professionally present on the Internet, although in the year 2000, nobody really realised yet how enormous the change would be – and that we would relatively soon be forced to prepare students to be Internet journalists, or to apply their various skills to the convergent, multimodal media.

The change in the curricula has not been a result of the rise of the importance of interactive media only, though. The other, maybe even more important factors were: the evolution of the ethos and internal functioning of the Polish academia itself, the changing expectations of the media market, and the epistemological change brought forth by the rise of mobile technologies, social and participatory media, and AI.

"Unpractical Education" vs. Cost Optimisation and Practical Needs of the Students

In the last decades, Polish academia as a whole has been gradually steering towards a corporate model of organisation, so-called economic optimisation, commercialisation of various areas of research and education, the growing pressure on measurability and standardisation of the results of academic output of all scholars, including those of humanities and social science. Therefore, the model of journalism studies based on "non-practical" humanities and social studies had to be in large part replaced by the set of practical and easily monetizable skills. We teach much less general knowledge nowadays. While over the last 25 years journalist studies in Poland have become well technically equipped (many universities run their own student television, broadcast stations, internet portals, and even research facilities), the very cost of the maintenance of those amenities leads to the rising cost of journalism studies. The cuts are therefore unavoidable, and they have to affect the "non-practical", "unnecessary" matters.

As a result of the cost optimisation, the very experience of studying had to change, too. Back in the times of the first programmes we started with the costly, but cognitively effective formulation of many subjects such as the seminars and workshops, conducted frequently in small groups. The general, longer lectures would be typically accompanied by seminars aimed at elucidation of the complex matters, discussions based on shared reading material, creative interpretations and re-interpretations of the subject matters. The small writing workshops were devoted to – among others – the discussions and critique of student's work by the lecturers and the students in the group. Journalism education would have been conducted through discussions and interactions. In today's world, the small group model of education being too expensive and seemingly time-consuming, it is supplanted by the bare lectures, and technical and practical workshops aimed at the skill training and/or development

of professional projects. It unfortunately is compounded by the Bologna process and the European Qualification Framework that strengthen the tendency to more standardization on an international level.

This happens also in response to the expectations of the students, not seeing the immediate gain in a patient pursuing the more general areas of knowledge and seeking the practical skill sets associated with technology, social engineering, persuasive communication, and – in the last years – independent social media production (i.e. the ability to run Tik Tok and YouTube profiles or become social media influencers). It is telling that while current media and communication studies at the universities both public and private stem from journalism programmes, journalism itself stopped being the first choice of our students, more interested in public relations, public opinion and public image creation, marketing, or Internet content creation. The very borders between journalism and other areas of social communication become blurred. Not just in Poland; it is a feature of the entire journalism dispositive and discourse (see Kirchhoff 2021, p. 111).

It is obvious that the expectations of the media market towards journalism education also tend to be aimed mostly at interactive and convergent media. The market seeks media workers with specific abilities to write, record material, make video footage, and take photos for Internet outlets. The journalism studies graduates are to be equipped with technical competence from the get-go. So while in the 90s and 00s, our students would have gone to the media as interns and learned technical skills there, now we are expected to prepare them to deal with all sorts of technical matters before they even start their internship in editorial offices or in whatever advertising or PR agencies they go to. This pragmatic approach seems to be profitable to the graduates, but the purely practical skills get dated very quickly due to fast development and constant changing of the tools and technologies. It would be then probably useful to devote more time and resources to the developing students' ability of critical thinking and active engagement with their culture. Still, the expectations of both the media market and students tend towards the concept of the journalist rather as a swift and crafty media content provider than a person of public trust, equipped with the intellectual ability to learn and influence society in a responsible way.

We of course respond to the market requirements and the situation in the mediasphere. The proof right now is that we (and few other higher education institutions, as far as I know) are preparing to open new specialisations aimed a providing our students with the ability to create so-called user-generated content. The plan of teaching people how to generate and distribute their own content in the shared communication space calls for a particularly big emphasis on good language skills, critical thinking and a sense of responsibility for the content they place in that space. Still, we had to considerably simplify our academic curriculum, adjusting it to the short attention span, relatively low literary culture and meagre cultural memory of the students interested mostly in "now", and not very interested in whatever it was before. I'm afraid that our students of 15–20 years ago were leaving university

with larger knowledge and a stronger sense of responsibility than those of today, even though they might have been less well-equipped to engage with technology.

Diminishing Relevance of Literary Competence

These are not only students' expectations that change; but also the skill sets and interests they bring into their journalism (or media-related) education in academia.

Today's candidates for media studies come to the university equipped with a good command of the English language, and often also with at least the ability to comprehend some other foreign language. They are well-travelled and have plenty of intercultural experiences which makes them potentially open-minded. They are not afraid to go abroad, to communicate in foreign languages, to accept new challenges. On the other hand, they begin their studies with the deficiencies resulting probably in part from the inadequacies of school education, but much more from the epistemological and communicative change associated with the proliferation of mobile, interactive, and social media.

What I find most perplexing – although maybe in the world of social media, it is understandable – is that journalism students nowadays rarely are interested in writing careers, and come with a relatively weak (as compared to their predecessors from ten or twenty years ago) command of their own language both spoken and written. Many are also not interested in reading, or even outright unwilling to read anything at all, which is compounded by the short attention spans and narrower vocabulary resulting from the constant use of mobile communication instruments. Therefore, while the practical knowledge about the everyday world, the general sense of freedom and assertiveness are probably growing, then the willingness to educate themselves and learn is diminished. While the young journalists' ability to react to what's happening in the world is probably stronger, their ability to understand it in its whole complexity or formulate complex, nuanced opinions is low.

The alienating effect of constant use of social media makes them also less prone to act in groups in real life and to form bonds with their colleagues.

Towards the Two-fold Journalist Education

Academia attempts to remedy these problems, formulating the BA studies as more profession-oriented, and MA programmes as "properly" academic. There is also the possibility to officially construct the university media institutes as "academic" or "professional". Still, teaching practical, applicable, monetizable skills is not what the universities are for. This kind of education – resulting in the formation of media workers/content providers for various communication bodies – can be placed in the most time and cost-effective manner within the framework of professional courses and schools attached to the various editorial offices and communication outlets, giving them the possibility to prepare workers suiting their particular technical needs.

On the other hand, one would maybe expect the university, engaged in the difficult balancing act between the adaptive and emancipatory/critical kind of knowledge (Kaliszewski 2020, p. 127), to put more emphasis on the latter. This means, less emphasis on immediately applicable, but short-lived practical skills, and more on the ability to engage with the world in a meaningful way. Journalism courses at universities, for the sake of quality education and responsibility for the future, should be teaching "of" and *"about"* journalism, with its complexity, diverse goals and results, and the requirement of life-long learning.

I am aware that my point of view is idealistic, and the general evolution of both academia and the media market point in another direction. Still, communication is probably the most important area of knowledge within the field of humanities and social studies right now. It is the key to whatever is going on in the world. If we as a university equip people with the ability to autonomously understand this world and think independently, together with cultural capital and erudition, our graduates can change accordingly to the world and be able to work in this ever-changing landscape. No matter what applicable skills they have to acquire, they will be probably able to find their place, whether they have to teach, write, record, photograph, create promotion, or work in political communication or propaganda.

This seems to be extremely important, as the simplification and "technicization" of journalism studies coincides with the moment when "On the one hand, journalism comes under pressure from governments and political interest groups and its democratic worth is being questioned by those who see it as little more than the mouthpiece of power elites. On the other hand, we can detect a growing sensitivity regarding the societal role of journalism and a renewed interest in strengthening journalistic quality (Kirchhoff 2021, p. 108).

The meta-review of the international discussions about the future of the journalist profession (Kirchhoff 2021, pp. 113–114) shows discernible tendencies in the discourse of media outlets and cultural institutions on journalism. It proves the importance for future journalists of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, data skills, and a deeper understanding of the results of changing media technologies. The importance of understanding the journalism roles in society, networking and the ability to collaborate, and creativeness and innovativeness will be growing. In times of fake news, strategic disinformation and political micro-targeting, the relevance of critical thinking, data literacy and fact-checking will assuredly increase, together with the importance of media ethics and accountability (Nordenstreng 2009). On the other hand, the need to train students for the needs of particular media outlets and to provide them with short-lived practical skills loses its importance. These content creators can teach themselves, or be trained in within the frame of practical, professional courses provided by the media outlets.

For now, in the Polish academic system, these tendencies to diminish vocational education and return to quality knowledge are yet not very visible.

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STRESZCZENIE

Zmieniające się studia, trwałe zasady (które także się zmieniają). Programy studiów dziennikarskich na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim; idee, kwestie praktyczne, studenci i rynek mediów

Artykuł opowiada o pierwszym oficjalnym minimum programowym studiów dziennikarskich w Polsce po roku 1989, jego zawartości oraz założeniach edukacyjnych i społecznych, jakie stały za jego sformułowaniem w roku 2000. Opisuje ewolucję programów oraz pragmatyki edukacji dziennikarskiej w Polsce w ciągu ostatnich 25 lat, na tle tendencji rynkowych, zmieniającej się koncepcji uniwersytetu oraz trendów w edukacji dziennikarskiej na świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: dziennikarstwo, profesja, rynek mediów, społeczna odpowiedzialność mediów, rola uniwersytetu, edukacja