

JOURNALISTIC HIGHER EDUCATION: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

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Abstract

There is an impressive number of journalistic university training models in the world, but all of them, regardless of their specifics, focus on the formation of two types of professional skills: general and specific. The general professional competences are in correlation with the contemporary trends of the development of the society and are meant to respond to the rising demands of the journalist to have a vast general knowledge. The specific competencies depend on the contemporary development trends of the media field and aim to satisfy the imperatives related to the application of journalistic pre-production, production and post-production tools, as well as the examination, through the means of science, of the media field. The structured sets of knowledge and skills assimilated by future journalists around the world vary from one culture to another, from one country to another, from one historical period to another. These variations are designed according to the socio-political and economic realities in which the teaching process takes place, as well as the traditions existing in higher education in the respective environments. At the same time, they also appear due to the different understanding, on the one hand, due to the social mission of the media and the journalist's role within the society, on the other hand, the professional culture of journalists in general and the minimum professionalism. Therefore, the conceptual transfiguration of professional skills is due to a series of intra- and extra-media factors that define the framework for the development of higher education in journalism and highlight the differences between university training processes organized in different education systems.

Keywords: *higher education of journalistic profile, didactic process, competences, objectives, finalities.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the existence of a classic universal concept of university training, in general, and journalistic training, in particular, in contemporary societies there is still no more or less common vision on its priorities. The debates regarding the knowledge that higher education must provide, the skills it must develop and the

competencies it must form are current even today, being oriented to identify solutions for solving conceptual dilemmas regarding the goals and purposes of studies of university journalism training.

Thus, "What kind of specialists should the higher education train?" is the question that arose with the initiation of journalistic university training, generated the most dilemmas and remained in use even today. In an attempt to find a clear answer to this question, scientific schools in the field of journalism, universities and research centres around the world have organized various conferences, congresses, debates and scientific sessions, the reasonings and arguments with which they operated within these forums referring – in particular, the objectives on which, as a priority, the didactic process of a journalistic profile should be focused in order to train specific skills. The debates aimed at solving this problem have shown that the difficulty of developing a unified concept of the university training of future journalists lies in the need to clarify the skills they must train. The structured ensembles of knowledge and skills, which future journalists should acquire through teaching/learning during their student years, in order to later be able to identify and solve professional problems of different levels and complexities, vary from one country to another, from one culture to another, from one reality to another. These variables are generated by the different understanding of the social mission of the mass media and the journalist's role in the society, from which a multitude of views regarding the professional culture of journalists, in general, and the minimum professional skills a young specialist must possess, in particular result.

2. CONTEXT

The identification and recognition at the international level of a mandatory minimum of professional skills, as well as the assumption of their formation in the process of journalistic university training is a fundamental problem, which, despite the fact that it has been in the attention of researchers since the establishment of higher education of journalistic profile, it has not been resolved even up to the present moment. This did not happen because of the differentiated understanding of the journalist's professional culture and the processes of transfiguration of the place and role of journalism as a social activity in contemporary societies.

At the same time, this could not be achieved due to the existing uncertainty in relation to the priorities of journalistic university training, or even to this day, it is not clear what the strategic objectives of the didactic process should be and what exactly the journalistic higher education should focus on:

- on the formation of professional culture or general culture;
- on the training of professional skills or research skills;
- on the development of creative skills or on the development of critical/academic thinking;
- on studying "real" journalism as it is, or learning "perfect" journalism as it actually should be;
- on the practice of journalism or on its research.

The differentiated understanding, on the one hand, of the journalist's professional culture, and, on the other hand, of the priorities of journalistic university training, however, does not appear out of nowhere. It is conditioned by certain internal factors, among which: the political regime, the type of economy and the social/cultural reality of the environment/country where the media and education system operates, as well as external factors, such as, for example, the development of modern information technologies and their implementation in journalistic production and in the university training of future journalists. These factors design the context and determine the activity conditions of the professional

training system, including those of future journalists, and contribute to the development of new educational paradigms and university pedagogies. From the perspective of the objectives and purposes of studies, but also of the educational paradigms it uses, the paradigm representing "...an example, a model, an exemplary model, capitalized in a certain field of activity..." (Cristea, 2014), the contemporary higher education with a journalistic profile can be classified into two broad categories, namely: classical journalistic higher education and mass journalistic higher education. The primary objective of *higher education with a classical journalistic profile* is the multilateral professional training of future specialists, its basic objectives being the formation of general culture and the development of students' critical/academic thinking. The didactic process is carried out through classical teaching-learning methods, being strictly oriented from the teacher to the student. This type of journalistic education is based on the training paradigm centred on the transfer of knowledge, according to which the didactic process is predominantly approached from an analytical, cumulative and transformative perspective. It promotes the idea that higher education institutions exist in order to provide quality instruction by teaching contents. According to it, in university pedagogy, the teacher is the active actor, who elaborates and disseminates didactic contents, and the student is the passive actor, who assimilates the contents offered by the teacher, thus accumulating new knowledge. In the training paradigm, the decisive role of the university teacher takes precedence the one who "has expertise and access to specific knowledge, knows best how to structure the learning materials and is responsible for directing the learning process" (De Graaff, 2015).

The training paradigm "took shape in the XVII century as a response to the need to develop capitalist industrial production, which demanded more education from the younger generation. The utilitarian function comes to the fore: the training of people capable of serving the expanding production. Starting from that moment and until nowadays, the mission of education is defined as the transfer of a system

of knowledge, skills to the educable, student, embracing a profession useful for society, preparing for labour" (Cojocaru, 2010).

In modern universities, higher education with a classical journalistic profile is practiced more and more rarely, being considered an outdated model and not very friendly to the contemporary world. Currently, in its pure form, it is practiced in some old, prestigious universities that preserve their traditions and strive for quality education, but also in higher education institutions in countries that have not accepted/adhered to the Bologna Process.

Mass journalistic higher education has as its primary purpose the applied professional training of future specialists, its basic objectives being the formation of professional culture and professional skills, as well as the development of creative skills. This type of journalistic education is based on the learning paradigm, according to which the didactic process is predominantly approached from an analytical-synthetic, integrative, dynamic, pragmatic and universal perspective (the last perspective emphasizes the concept of the universal journalist, intensively promoted by David Randall). The specificity of the professional training process in mass higher education resides in the fact that it is: 1) student-centred, 2) based on the PBL (Problem Based Learning) concept and 3) self-directed.

In mass higher education, the university professor manifests himself as an actor who facilitates university training by creating student-friendly learning environments, and the student – as an actor capable of directing his own learning process and building an individual academic path. This type of university training redefines the role of the parties involved in the professional training process, limiting the implications of the teaching staff in the learning process and expanding those of the student, a fact that projects the emergence of the so-called active learning model.

Active learning facilitates the exchange of knowledge both vertically – from teacher to student and horizontally – from student to student, making students feel free, speak their minds and develop critical thinking, which is an important learning outcome. This is a method of intellectual, affective and volitional involvement

of students in the process of projecting knowledge, acquiring new things, training professional skills, which conditions a student-centred learning environment and develops their divergent and analytical thinking. The specificity of this training also resides in the (inter)active learning, focused on the vertical and horizontal interactions, which are established in the process of the lessons between the actors of the didactic process, such as: the interactions between the teacher and students, the interactions between the groups of students within an academic community/group and the interpersonal interactions between students of an academic community/group. "(Inter)active learning is an active, volitional, internally mediated process, in which the learner discovers, infers, constructs and re-signifies meanings, making use of learning materials, analysing situations and experiences, etc. and passing them through the filters of his own personality. The individual who actively learns is his own initiator and organizer of learning experiences, able to constantly reorganize and restructure his own acquisitions, in a systemic vision" (Axintii, 2014).

Currently, mass journalistic higher education is considered one of the most modern models of professional training, precisely because it promotes university pedagogy of active and (inter)active learning in order to train general and specific skills, necessary for the integration of graduates in the labour market and the exercise of the profession. "At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, modern approaches emphasize the fact that the knowing subject actively exercises his own thinking, his own mental operations, performs constructive and progressive activities, being in interaction with one or more individuals. In this way, a sociogenetic and constructivist conception of cognitive development and a socio-constructivist perspective of studying were outlined, which consider that new knowledge is built by the learner, in a process of forming new essential relationships in learning." (Axintii, 2014)

Therefore, the concepts of these two types of journalistic university education differ significantly from each other, respectively, the skills that are formed through them also vary substantially.

In the thirty years of independence, both types of university training for future journalists and communicators were applied consecutively in journalistic higher education in the Republic of Moldova: in the first years of independence, the classical type higher education, inherited by to the Soviet educational system, which, towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, began to be substituted with mass education. This metamorphosis occurred as a result of the accession of the Republic of Moldova, in 2005, to the European area of higher education (Bologna Process).

The year 2005 was a turning point for higher education in the field of journalism in the Republic of Moldova, that is when the first paradigmatic changes were made, which irreversibly changed the course of university training for future journalists. More precisely, the first changes were made then, in order to ensure its competitiveness, accessibility and attractiveness by making it compatible with European higher education standards. As a result, the changes in question were implemented with the aim of the accession of Moldovan higher education to the Common European Higher Education Area, which led to the fundamental change of the concept and functional principles of journalistic university training and to its massification.

The new format, in which the journalistic higher education in the Republic of Moldova was corseted, imposed European educational standards of professional training, which, in the process of implementation, were subjected to localization, obtaining new variations and meanings, different from the original ones. As a result of this fact, Moldovan journalism higher education has formed its own identity, which significantly distinguishes it, both conceptually and functionally, from the journalistic higher education in other European countries.

One of the distinctive elements of the identity of Moldovan higher education with a journalistic profile are the study objectives and purposes, which were developed, taking into account the specifics of the social-economic reality in the Republic of Moldova, and were oriented "... towards the formation of both the general knowledge, as well as the professional one of

future specialists, necessary for their placement in various media institutions: print media, news agencies, radio, television, online platforms and portals. At the same time, they were also oriented in the direction of ensuring the acquisition of professional skills and abilities, sufficient to carry out the tasks of creation and production of quality journalism." (Stepanov, 2019a)

We note that the main purpose of journalism-related higher education in the Republic of Moldova resides in the training of universal specialists. To a large extent, this desideratum is specific to professional journalistic training systems in small countries, where the distribution area of media production is limited and the number of media institutions is not very large, as well as new or vacant jobs which the labour market offers. At the same time, the desirability in question is also specific to the journalistic professional training systems in poor countries, where journalists usually work in a few places to have a decent living, or the prospect of working in a single media institution and having a good quality of life is illusory. Both in one case and in another, graduates with universal training (with work skills in both RTV and agency journalism, online, print media) have a higher chance of getting a job in an institution media and to remain in the profession than those who specialized in a single media field. It is obvious that the social-economic reality in which journalism higher education is carried out directly and unconditionally influences its study objectives and purposes, as well as the professional skills that are formed in the didactic process.

In the order of the historical evolution of journalism, the socio-political and economic changes, which determined the substitution of some political regimes with others, caused the emergence of different theories/philosophies (Siebert, F. S., Peterson, Th., Schramm, W., 1963) regarding the place and functions of mass media in society. These, in turn, highlighted new concepts of professional university training and required the formation of new professional skills. "Problems of a global nature that affect the society in general inevitably have an impact on the sphere of education. The periods of crisis accompanied by socio-economic (and political) reforms are usually characterized by a collapse

of stereotypes at the level of both social groups and individuals..." (Maistru & Crețu, 2018) and by training others, in the context of the new social, political, economic, cultural, technical, etc. processes and based on the new values, principles and objectives. Therefore, political realities influence the general concept of journalistic university education and trigger the process of replacing the old study objectives and purposes with new ones. In societies with restrictive political regimes, the key competences that journalism faculties must train are of an ideological nature, the priority being agitation and propaganda, because higher education in journalism itself is more of an ideological training process, than one of professional training. More than that, the entire mass media system is regarded as an "instrument for legitimizing power and exercising its orders; means of forming the image of power; form of education and mobilization of the masses for the achievement of internal and external political and economic objectives." (Stepanov, 2019b)

On the contrary, in societies with democratic political regimes, higher education with a journalistic profile receives the freedom to think critically and to act freely, in the name of truth and public interest – principles that project new objectives and purposes of study. According to them, the skills that the journalism faculties must train must be, first of all, of a utilitarian nature, so as to ensure the young graduates the opportunity to engage without difficulty in the field of labour and to access the profession. Thus, the political reality in which journalistic higher education is carried out, alongside the socio-economic one, directly and unconditionally influences the study objectives and purposes of the didactic process, respectively, and the professional skills that are formed within university training.

Lately, the subject of the objectives, skills and study objectives of the university training of future journalists, have returned with a new force to the attention of scientists in the field (Bleandură, 2013; Gugulan, 2018; Drok, 2011), because, in the second decade of the 21st century, journalism registered several metamorphoses of a conceptual and functional nature, resulting from the evolution, on the one hand, of new

societal needs, and, on the other, of new information technologies. "In the digital age, journalism is subject to a rapid process of changing old professional standards and forming new standards, being catalysed by the convergence of informational communication technologies of journalism, public relations and advertising." As a result of this process, some traditional practices were neutralized and modified, and others – substituted with new procedural operations, a fact that had immediate repercussions on the concept of journalistic university training. In this situation, universities began to look for opportunities to adjust their educational standards to the new development trends of the mass media/labour market system and to modify them according to the evolution of contemporary media phenomena and processes at the national and international level. Under these circumstances, the objectives of university training have expanded, being oriented to form digital skills in accordance with the new convergent operational practices, determined by the rapid and massive practice of new information technologies in journalistic production.

Currently, the journalistic didactic processes in the higher education of many democratic countries are oriented to form professional skills that facilitate the access of the young specialist to the labour market, ensure his optimal integration in the contemporary media industry and offer him the subsequent opportunity to continue his studies in the field or to advance in the profession. In order to achieve these goals, journalism faculties focus on training two types of professional skills: general and specific. General competences are defined on the fields of study, having a high degree of generality and complexity, and specific competences – on the fields of professional training, as it emerges from the characteristics and particularities of the specialties/study programs. As a rule, specific skills are derived from general skills, being stages and/or tools in their acquisition.

Through the formation of general skills, the complex and integral professional training of future specialists in the field of mass media is aimed at, their intellectual and professional potential, which would be sufficient for them to

take conscious, correct and equidistant actions on their part for the benefit of the society. The definition of general competences is in direct correlation and responds to the rising demands of the individual and society to have truthful, current, complete and objective information regarding the facts, events, phenomena and trends of the socio-political, economic and cultural contemporary. Among the general skills we include: the application of methodologies for explaining the surrounding world, of theoretical knowledge in performing practical activities; the efficient and deontological resolution of usual professional situations; the activity in different sociocultural environments; the communication of information, ideas, problems and solutions from the professional field in the mother tongue and in an internationally spoken language; the acquisition of multidisciplinary team work techniques, with the performance of certain tasks on hierarchical levels regarding the collection, analysis and interpretation of socio-political, economic, cultural information, etc.

The specific competencies orient the students towards the examination, through the means of science, of the media field in order to optimize its way of organization and operation and towards the application of journalistic pre-production, production and post-production tools. The most important specific skills reside in: the application of techniques for searching, collecting, sorting and validating information in the process of journalistic documentation; designing, developing, creating, editing and evaluating journalistic media materials; applying the principles of editing and broadcasting journalistic products for print, audiovisual and online media; knowledge of the legislative, deontological framework and job duties of different categories of journalists; knowledge of the principles of organization, management and evaluation of media pre-production, production and post-production; conducting applied research in the field of journalism and media processes, analysing and evaluating contemporary media phenomena, etc.

But the structured ensembles of knowledge and skills, which journalism students from all over the world assimilate through learning, despite the typicality of the basic conditions of

contemporary journalism-related higher education, vary significantly from one country to another. These variations are designed according to the socio-political and economic realities in which the didactic process takes place, as well as the existing traditions in higher education in the respective environments. At the same time, they also appear due to the different understanding of the role of journalism as a social activity in contemporary times, the professional culture of journalists and the minimum professional skills that a young specialist should possess. The professional competences that future journalists acquire in the process of university training, being subject to permanent conceptual and functional transfigurations, also differ from one historical period to another. Their evolution over time is due to a series of intra- and extra-media factors, which define the framework for the development of journalistic higher education and highlight the differences between university training processes organized in different educational systems.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the history of journalism education, the dilemmas regarding the objectives and study goals of university journalism training have made it difficult to conceptualize the university didactic process and have made it impossible to develop and apply on a world scale a universal format of university journalism training. These, as a rule, have their roots in the differentiated understanding of what professional culture means, which must sum up the minimum of professional skills that a young specialist trained in this field should have, in order to fulfil his job duties and production missions. The differentiated understanding of the professional culture, however, projects very different visions in relation to the priorities of journalistic university training, this fact leaving its mark on the conceptualization of the didactic process in the specialized faculties. As a result, the concept of journalistic higher education is very heterogeneous, there is an impressive number of models of university training worldwide, each

with its own goals, objectives and purposes of studies.

The differentiated understanding of the priorities of the university training of future journalists, which directly and unconditionally influences the process of training professional skills in the relevant faculties, is determined by a number of intra- and extra-media factors. Among the most relevant we speak about: the professional culture existing in the environment where the professional training process is carried out; the socio-political and economic reality there; the type of education practiced; the priorities (objectives/purposes) of the teaching process; the evolution of the media phenomenon and the modern technologies.

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