



 **Journalism as
Academic Study**

**JOURNALISM AS ACADEMIC STUDY – Austria Fellowship Program
for Media Professionals and Media Experts in 2001/2002**

FINAL PAPER

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**“(Reform of the) Curriculum for students of Journalism and Media Studies.
A Comparative Study: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France and Slovenia
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Abstract

The paper explores the organisation, contents and development of curricula for students of Journalism and Media Studies, as well as journalists and media (public relations) professionals in a comparative perspective in four countries - Austria, France, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia. The author looked at academic programmes (universities, research institutes), and was also interested what kind of education and training was provided by media institutions and different professional associations themselves.

Here, two models of education have been observed: the Germanic and Francophon. The former traditionally understands journalism as an academic discipline within the Communication and Media Studies, with more theoretical background, whereas as to latter, the priority is given to professional development and practical training for work in the media. The same trends has been traced also in the countries of East Central and South East Europe, within the specific tradition of their societies and media. Whereas at the start, they followed the Germanic model and established Communication Departments at their respective universities, later they discovered the advantages of the Francophon model and tried to implement it either within the existent home institutions or within a new (NGO) framework with the foreign support.

Introduction

“What should a graduate [of journalism] know about history, theory and practice of journalism and in what ratio? Extreme opinions on the problem are hardly acceptable. Journalism education at universities cannot be reduced to mere practical skills either. On the other hand, we educate our students mostly for practical activity, so they should master its fundamentals.”¹

¹ Vojtek, Juraj, and Vátrál, Jozef (2001): Changes in University Education of Journalists in Slovakia since 1989, p. 221. In The Global Network/Le Réseau Global: *Journalism Education in Central and Eastern Europe*. Communication and Society in Eastern Europe, No. 15/16.

The above questions and dilemmas have persistently lingered on minds of academicians and researchers, teachers and trainers involved with the preparation and implementation of the curricula for students of Journalism and Media Studies. For some time they have been on the agenda in Western countries with established media and complementary education systems. Thus, the countries of East-Central and South-East Europe, still in process of transition, attempt to follow the steps and thereby, struggle with their own specific problems.

This paper explores the organisation, contents and development of curricula for students of Journalism and Media Studies, as well as journalists and media (public relations) professionals in a comparative perspective. I looked at academic programmes (universities, research institutes), and was also interested what kind of education and training was provided by media institutions and different professional associations themselves. The countries compared – Austria, France, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia - were chosen to reflect the contrasts among different models and approaches, and allow to recognise a pattern of development in education and training programmes for journalists and media professionals.

Through my comparative study, I have asked the following questions:

- what are the necessary theoretical fundamentals and the required practical skills for a journalist and a media (public relations) professional
- how observed institutions provide for a well balanced education in this respect
- how responsive to extended media needs they are
- what can the East Central and South East countries learn and take from the developed Western systems of education and vice versa, what must Western educators take into account when coming into the region

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The structure of the paper will follow the main features and argumentation of the described models as illustrated by comparative case studies: education in journalism as an academic study; as a practical training; as a need for new journalistic schools; and as a combination of an academic study and practical training. The research findings have been based on the study and analysis of secondary sources - relevant literature, print materials and web pages, as well as reached to via primary sources – visits in the field, interviews, personal observation and experience. The main importance of these lies in their direct applicability to formulation and improvement of concrete education and training programmes for students of journalism and media studies in the respective CEE and SEE countries.

In Austria, as a typical example of the Germanic model of education, programmes of journalism are offered mostly at the social and political sciences universities as an academic, undergraduate and graduate study, under the title “Publizistik”.²

Here strong stress is given to firm theoretical grounds in communication studies, history and law. These are offered within the following obligatory courses: introduction to communication sciences, methods of communication sciences, theories of communication sciences, media and communication history, legal grounds for mass communication, work and social rights for communication professions, political grounds for mass communication. Also with division of track into print and broadcasting media, the students of journalism primarily analyse it through given matrixes of communication sciences.

In addition, such academic programmes provide a limited choice of optional courses on diverse subjects. Among these students of journalism can specialise in movies; media teaching; public relations; advertising and market communication; economic grounds for mass communication; publishing houses; market and public opinion research; information and documentation; communication technologies; methods of empirical social sciences; methods of historical sciences; statistics; print media and broadcasting media. Merely a few hours is devoted to practicing journalism, either in form of seminars or practice session. Cooperation with media is of a limited scope, with editors as guest lecturers and media internships, but rather more at local and regional level. Due to lack of practice and poor relevance, study of journalism in Austria as such is objected to sharp criticism by the profession.³

² University of Vienna, Institute for Communication Science, Study plan for Journalism (“Publizistik”) at http://www.univie.ac.at/STRV-Publizistik/studium/studienplan/studienplan_aktuell.html, 26 March 2002. See comparable programmes at the Institute for Economic and Social History of the Karl-Franzens-University of Graz at <http://www.kfunigraz.ac.at/lmkwww/> and at the Institute for Communication Science of the University of Salzburg at <http://www.kowi.sbg.ac.at/index.cfm?menuid=3>

³ Editors of ORF, Falter and Der Standard at a debate on potentials and limitations of journalists’ education, Vienna, 17 October 2001. At <http://derstandard.at/dyn/aktuell>, 25 October 2001.

Thus, it is interesting to observe that Austrian universities respond more to specialised demands of highly expanding professions like public affairs and public relations, by means of offered courses, programmes and also projects.⁴ Most of them recognise also the importance and influence of new technologies, and include them within the regular academic and research activities. Here, smaller, regional schools seem to be more responsive and somehow lead the way.⁵

Beside academic programmes, the only professional institution offering basic and mid-career training for journalists in Austria is the Kuratorium für Journalistenausbildung (KfJ) in Salzburg.⁶ The basic training developed from three weeks courses to a twelve weeks college (Österreichisches Journalisten-Kolleg) over the years (four times three weeks spread over nine months). The programmes of the KfJ are developed in very close co-operation with those concerned: the publishers, the unions, the broadcasters, i.e. the whole industry. This means that in an advisory council reporter, editors, publishers and expert from universities (University of Vienna and University of Salzburg) work together to find the most suitable way to transmit the desired contents.

The predominant subject matters of the offered courses and seminars are:

1. improvement of journalistic skills (language, layout, computer-aided research, management skill, press law)
2. imparting knowledge about different fields of coverage (local politics, interior politics, foreign politics, economy, ecology, science, culture, criminal reporting, court reporting, social relations)
3. imparting background knowledge about current themes (Austria and the Common Market, Aids, privatisation and exchange transactions, the Third World, ecological developments)

⁴ For example, the Institute for Communication Science of University of Vienna and the Institute for Economic and Social History of the Karl-Franzens-University of Graz offer a programme for Master of Advanced Studies in Public Relations and for Public Relations Professionals, respectively.

⁵ See for example programmes on telecommunications and media, simulation news technique, and media management at professional school in St. Poelten at

http://www.fhstpoelten.ac.at/files/studiengang_tkm/ak_news.html

⁶ Legally it is a private association, and the members are the Austrian Newspaper Publishers' Association (VÖZ Verband Österreichischer Zeitung), the Austrian Periodical Publishers' Association (ÖZV Österreichischer Zeitschriften- und Fachmedien-Verband) and the Austrian Journalists' Union (ÖGB, Sektion Journalisten). In 1971 the VÖZ arranged the first basic training course for journalists in Austria, and in 1978, after some more basic training courses, the Kuratorium was founded by the Newspaper Publishers, the Periodical Publishers and the Journalist Union. In 1994, after the Österreichische Journalisten-Kolleg had a successful start, the Österreichische Medienakademie was established within the framework of the Kuratorium für Journalistenausbildung. More at <http://www.kfj.at>

4. imparting background knowledge about developments in mass communication and research (computers and newspapers, cable-TV and satellite-communication, internet-publishing, digital photography, foreign media, opinion polls, effects of mass communication, ethics and journalism).

For the time being, the Austrian media themselves have not yet organised special courses, programmes or schools for their employee, i.e. reporters and editors, as already set in motion by many of their German counterparts.⁷

⁷ For example RTL-Journalist School in Koeln, Burda-Journalist school in Muenchen, Journalist School Axel Springer in Hamburg. For programmes see web pages of the respective media: <http://www.burda.de>, <http://www.asp.de>, <http://www.rtl.de>

JOURNALISM AS PRACTICAL TRAINING – France

The established education model in France understands journalism as a combination of essential knowledge and practical skills. Therefore, the recognised, successful programmes include the most of both in unique practical training exercises. The best example is provided by a two year graduate programme at the leading journalism school in France, Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille (ESJ).⁸

Here, students enter the school with diverse educational background (law, economy, political sciences, languages etc.). In their first year, they build on their knowledge and understanding of history, contemporary problems, French and English; and acquire the basics of media, media law, media economy and professional ethics. Further on, they proceed to professional techniques of information gathering, local sources of information, media formats, parts of an article, practical training in writing and editing, and introduction to photography, radio, television and multimedia journalism. At the point of proceeding to second year, students choose a thematic option of their further specialisation: international news, sports, covering great social events, economic and financial news.

In their second year, students further look into great contemporary questions, media enterprises, media and judiciary, media and politics. Thus, they mainly work on their professional journalistic assignments in separate, intensive programme tracks for which they have decided: press, agency, radio, television and multimedia. In addition, an extraordinary track in “reporting of images”, whereby one masters specific technical skills involved with the usage of the Betacam camera, is provided. Student work is performed in real life working conditions, abiding by deadlines and standards of journalistic reporting, with proper technical equipment and supervised by media professionals – journalists and editors from relevant French media outlets. For example, students prepare a daily radio and television news programme or publish their version of an existent, prominent French newspaper or magazine (L’Expres, Leelle, Nouvel Explorateur etc.).⁹

ESJ also offers education programmes (6 months to 1 year) with specialisation in regional journalism, science in journalism and agriculture in journalism. Special training courses (one week) on diverse topics – for example, different styles of journalistic writing, strategies of media management and marketing, usage of Internet, reporting about the European Union etc.¹⁰ – are organised for practicing journalists. On all the mentioned points of the graduate and mid-career education programme, ESJ

⁸ Established in 1924, until now 2500 journalists graduated. Study programmes summarised from <http://www.esj-lille.fr/formations/generaliste>, 5 April 2002. Also interviews with Laurent Passicouset, Head of ESJ’s Department for Foreign Activities, October 2001-March 2002.

⁹ See at <http://www.esj-lille.fr/kiosque.htm>

¹⁰ The annual course list in ESJ, 2001: ESJ-Médias, Nos formations en 2002.

closely cooperates with French media, via exchange of lecturers, financial support, formulation of the courses, work assignments etc. Vice versa, ESJ diploma is widely recognised as a professional journalistic license, and ESJ students easily get employment at the major French media.

Besides education for French media, ESJ activities involve also support to Francophone media abroad, reinforcement of journalism centers abroad, setting up of journalism curricula abroad, proficiency courses for foreign journalists, joint programme (ESJ/Laval University – Quebec) in foreign journalism.¹¹ ESJ's field of international cooperation includes also countries of East-Central and South-East Europe.

A comparable education programme for journalists is offered by a well established center for training in journalism, Centre de Formation et de Perfectionnement au Journalisme, in Paris. Here, students are introduced to basic journalistic techniques and specialise in reporting for one of the media outlets (agency, press, radio, television, multimedia or images).¹² Among those schools recognised by the Convention of national journalists one can further find many practically, training oriented, but a few academic institutions: Institut Pratique de Journalism, Paris; Centre Universitaire d'Enseignement du Journalisme, Strasbourg; CELSA, Neuilly-sur-Seine; Ecole de Journalism et de Communication de Marseille; Ecole de journalisme de Toulouse; IUT de Tours – Department Information-Communication Option journalisme, Tours; and IUT de Bordeaux – Filiere Journalism, Gradignan Cedex. The oldest university institute for research of information and communication Institut Francais de Presse in Paris is for example not recognised by the profession. The same holds for other academic and research natured institutions in the field of media, communication and journalism.¹³

¹¹ In ESJ, 2001: ESJ – International, ESJ Department for Foreign Activities.

¹² Study programme at <http://www.cfpj.com/cfj/program.htm>, 25 March 2002.

¹³ Les ecoles de journalisme, reconnues ar la Convention collective nationale des journaliste & Les ecoles de journalisme, “non-reconnues” par la profession – at <http://membres.tripod.fr/BibDocESJ/Journalisme/ecoles.htm>

NEED FOR NEW SCHOOLS OF JOURNALISM - Bosnia and Herzegovina

With overall reconstruction in the post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, the existent education of journalists and media professionals has not properly served the needs of the new media environment and society. Five faculties of journalism in Banja Luka, Bihać, Mostar, Sarajevo and Tuzla found itself with scarce human resources and outdated equipment.¹⁴ Therefore, a special effort, by the help of the international community, was made to establish new schools, providing proper education and professional training of journalists. Most of them followed the successful Western models, in particular the Francophon.

High School of Journalism at Media Plan Institute, Sarajevo started with its one-year graduate programme under the auspices of ESJ, Lille, in October 2001. As at its French senior partner institution, here the curriculum consists of the following parts:

1. General media education: journalism ethics, codes of practice in journalism, culture of communication; European media landscape; media landscape in South-East Europe; media law; media and politics; media and market; media and culture
2. Practical professional education: information sources and information gathering; research methods in journalism; research journalism; multimedia; agency; radio; television; press
3. Topical specialisation: international relations and European integration; reporting from conflict and post-conflict areas; reporting on government; reporting on culture; research and reporting on corruption; reporting on state of human rights (in particular rights of children and minors); conflict resolution – implementation in journalism

Here, during three semesters students go from basic knowledge and understanding of media environment to final professional specialisation in one of the media outlets and expert specialisation in one of the offered topical fields. At the end of their schooling, they have to provide their final work, prepared under professional supervision – a list of press articles in research journalism; production of radio pieces, a complex radio edition or a debate; production of TV news, a research documentary or a debate. This entitles them for a diploma by both, Media Plan, Sarajevo, and High School of Journalism, Lille, which is widely recognised all over Europe.¹⁵ Thus, the costs of the school are almost completely covered by the French government and the European Commission and no sincere

¹⁴ From interviews with Professor Jelena Vočkić – Avgadić and Lejla Turčilo, Assistant Lecturer, Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences, Sarajevo, 20 October 2001.

¹⁵ Study programme at <http://www.mediaplan.ba/mediaplan/skola/plan.htm>, 14 October 2001

interest or serious involvement of the home media institutions can be noted. Therefore, at this point one can hardly guarantee for a long-term existence of the school.¹⁶

Another independent institution, Media Centar, Sarajevo, in cooperation with BBC World Service Training (BBC WST) and the British Government's Department for International Development (DfID), offers the BBC Journalist Training Programme in Bosnia from 1996. The programme provides general 10-week courses in radio and television for young journalists from all over the country. Besides, one organises also shorter, specialised courses, workshops and seminars, adapted to actual media needs – for example, Radio News Management, News Editing, Broadcasting Skills&Crafts, Camera Course for Beginners, Advanced Camera Course, Television (Editorial) Course, Introduction to Audience Research, News for Local Radio, Local Station Management, Senior Production Radio/Digital Audio Editing etc.¹⁷

The programme shows its professional, practical orientation through its trainers who are all practicing media professionals, either from BBC or other relevant institutions in Bosnia. Also its future goals prove this orientation:

- to develop further into a nationally and internationally recognised centre of excellence for the provision of broadcast journalism training in BiH
- be open to, and indeed actively encourage, course participants from all areas of BiH
- integrate and co-ordinate its curriculum with other existing media training providers in BiH
- specialise in practical, hands-on training courses both for students of journalism and for practising journalists and media professional
- provide courses covering all areas of the broadcast media sector, i.e. editorial, production, technical, managerial and commercial skills for both radio and television
- extend its courses in the emerging on-line technology
- maintain close contacts with the major broadcast media organisations throughout BiH in order to ensure that the training offered at the Programme is relevant to the needs of the industry
- provide "Training The Trainers" courses for BiH media professionals

The Programme also envisages, in the medium- to long-term, also to attract students and practising journalists from outside BiH, thus developing into a wider, regional broadcast journalism training centre.¹⁸

¹⁶ From an interview with Ljiljana Zurovac, Director of the High School of Journalism MediaPlan, Sarajevo, 19 October 2001.

¹⁷ At <http://www.media.ba/bbc/bbc2.htm>

¹⁸ From an interview with Boro Kontić, Editor-in-Chief, Media Centar, Sarajevo, 21 October 2001.

PRACTICAL TRAINING WITHIN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES - Slovenia

Though perceived as a well developed, the media landscape in Slovenia is also still in the process of transition. This concerns not only the state of media regulation, media ownership and privatisation, but is reflected also in some ill practices of journalism, advertising, media relations and public communication. One can state that these originate mainly from poor knowledge and experience of professionals and practitioners which calls for tailored education and training. Thus, offered programmes at academic level have to be supported and enriched with practical training.

The only institution providing a study programme of journalism in Slovenia is Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana. The undergraduate programme, taking place at the Department of Media and Communication Studies, Chair of Journalism, resembles to a large extent the Germanic, Austrian model.

The main principle underlying this study programme¹⁹ is the character of the "threesome" which embraces basic communication and methodological, linguistic and practical and specialist social sciences skills. The study of journalism is entirely based on theoretical knowledge in communication sciences, public opinion, theories of communication, political communication, comparative analysis of media systems in Europe and in the world, economy, political sciences, social and political psychology, and anthropology. Students become familiar also with reflexive and critical views, in particular with journalistic ethics, the history of journalism and communication rights.

The practical part of the programme provides with writing skills in diverse journalistic formats – a report, an interview, a feature story, a column, a portrait and a review. Students also get acquainted with work for different media – print, radio and television.²⁰ The practice sessions in broadcasting include basic knowledge and skills in montage, recording techniques and preparation of news stories. The programme is based on instrumental skills, comprising of Slovene language culture and general stylistics, at least one foreign language, and the techniques and technologies involved in reporting for the media (print and broadcasting media).

Here, one attempts to build on the practical side of journalist education and training by means of guest speakers and lecturers which are foreign experts in the field of journalism (in particular Fulbright scholars), as well as eminent Slovene media personalities, journalists, commentators and editors.

¹⁹ Study programme and list of courses at <http://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/anglescina/default.htm>

²⁰ Interestingly enough, no course on New media or On-line Journalism is yet provided. Thus, a specialised undergraduate programme in multimedia (telecommunication) studies is established at the University of Maribor. At <http://www.tkinfo.uni-mb.si/tkinfo.asp>

Courses on writing for the press, radio and television journalism are taught exclusively by practicing journalists and editors. Students publish their own student magazine, Bonus, co-edited by the editor of the most-read Slovene daily. Further on, some workshops and joint projects were conceived and implemented with ESJ, Lille. 1st and 2nd year students of journalism worked with ESJ professional lecturers on techniques and writing of an interview, a feature story and a reportage. 3rd and 4th year students prepared their media works during two sets of comprehensive journalistic exercises:

1. Attitudes toward Immigrants (October 2001-March 2002)– workshop on research techniques; overview of relevant documents, material, media coverage, public opinion polls; outline of issues; interviews; preparation of articles in different media formats; editing and outlay with editors in Lille; publication of special Bonus issue

2. Editing (January 2001-June 2002)- preparation and publication a newspaper/magazine comparable to a daily edition/supplement of DELO under tutorship of professionals from DELO and others; including sessions on layout of the newspaper, covering domestic politics/interior political affairs, local/regional affairs, foreign affairs, sports and culture, photo-reporting, editing, editorial decision-making, work in the field - reporting and writing

No independent, professional school or programme in journalism has been yet established in Slovenia, due to scarce interest and support by the media institutions. A great share of independent work in the field of media education and training is taken over by the Peace Institute and its Media Programme, including Media Watch publication and newsletter. Besides, some joint efforts were made to provide an innovative and interactive forum of observation, education and training in the field of journalism, advertising and public relations.²¹

²¹ MEDIA FORUM, Ljubljana, has been established by a team of young media and communication experts, university teachers, researchers, students and professionals in this field who focus on media and communication related projects in the region of Central, East and Southeast Europe. It wants to provide for a reference point for all countries in transition, at which legal grounds and practice of freedom of speech, professional media activity and responsible public communication would be discussed, observed, checked, set and published. See <http://www.media-forum.si>

Conclusion

The following comparative study looked into curricula for students of journalism and media studies, attempting to distinguish different approaches to education in this field. Here, it identified two models and two sub-versions with their particularities and also merging points. As described, the Austrian model understands education in journalism strictly as an academic study, whereas the Francophon as basically practical training. The two countries from the region try to combine the optimal of the two, whereby Bosnia and Herzegovina entirely takes over foreign models of professional journalistic schools, Slovenia, on the other hand, remains with its traditional education system, supplementing it with practical training.

Thus, concerning the contents of the curricula, one seems to agree on the following:

- study of journalism should include some basic courses looking into the framework in which media and journalists operate (media law and ethics, media and politics; media and economy; history and contemporary problems etc.)
- student of journalism should have at least some theoretical background (communication sciences, political sciences, economy, law etc.), allowing them further specialisation (reporting on interior politics, international affairs, economy and finance, culture and society etc.)
- practical courses should provide training in basic techniques of news gathering and journalistic writing, and at the same time, train in specific skills needed for different media outlets

When formulating and renovating the described journalism curricula, in all countries one realised the importance of listening and answering to media needs, as the media institutions are the best consumers of education services, therefore, most viable sponsors and also source of most professional trainers. Therefore, Austria and France are progressive in relying more and more on initiatives from the media and their professional organisations and tend to cooperate with them on common, applied projects. Whereas in Slovenia, as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina domestic media and their professional organisation are generally interested, but only indirectly involved with the education of journalists and media professionals in the region.

Also when trying to address further questions - institutional vs. non-institutional education, home vs. foreign programmes, shorter vs. longer programmes – one should first look into the country specific media environment and primarily on the basis of an assessment of professional needs, formulate and improve concrete education and training programmes.