

## **New trends in Journalism curriculum development. Romania within the international context<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract:**

With the relatively recent technological, social and economic changes, journalism education and training need rethinking. The journalism curricula should be adapted in order to provide graduates with skills and competences that could answer the professional challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: reflectivity, problem-solving, initiative and the ability to develop new products or formats. Critical thinking, innovation and entrepreneurial skills are key aspects of the new direction in Journalism education worldwide.

*Key words: Curriculum development, journalism education, new media technologies*

### **Journalism education around the world**

One hundred years ago, the first class graduated at Columbia School of Journalism, which since then continuously provided top education and training for future professional journalists. It was in 1903 when the famous journalist and newspaper owner Joseph Pulitzer proposed a school of journalism, in spite the fact that his own successful yellow press business perfectly functioned without trained journalists. The educational project became reality only in 1912, when 79 students started classes on journalism.

In the first half of the 20th century, the American example was influential in the establishment and development of journalism education both in Europe (Germany, Austria), and outside the context of liberal democracies such as China and Soviet Union (Du Toit, 2013:147). After the World War II, the US model for journalism education<sup>2</sup> expanded in Canada, the Netherlands and Italy (Gaunt, 1992:60). In Scandinavia, the establishment of journalism education occurred later, in the mid-1960's. American influence also spread in Third World countries/developing nations: Latin America in the 1950's and, from the 1960's onwards in the Middle East, Asia and Africa (Du Toit, 2013:151).

A particular type of American influence can be identified by the end of the 1980's and at the beginning the 1990's in former Eastern European communist countries and former Soviet Union, where journalism education, established on a soviet model, became stigmatized as bastions of communist ideology and needed a reform in order to deliver untainted journalists (Gaunt, 1992:82). Western media companies, government agencies, professional associations and universities responded to this need, initiating media assistance

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<sup>2</sup> The US model of journalism education refers to a curricula in which training in writing and reporting practices exist in a relationship of tension with the academic study of communication.

projects to provide the newly independent countries with knowledge about journalism conceptualized from a liberal perspective.

At the beginning of the 21st century, 2338 journalism programs were offered by universities worldwide (WJEC, 2010). Figures are showing that American influence decreases, while journalism education in emerging countries (China, India, Russia, Brazil) are continuously expanding.

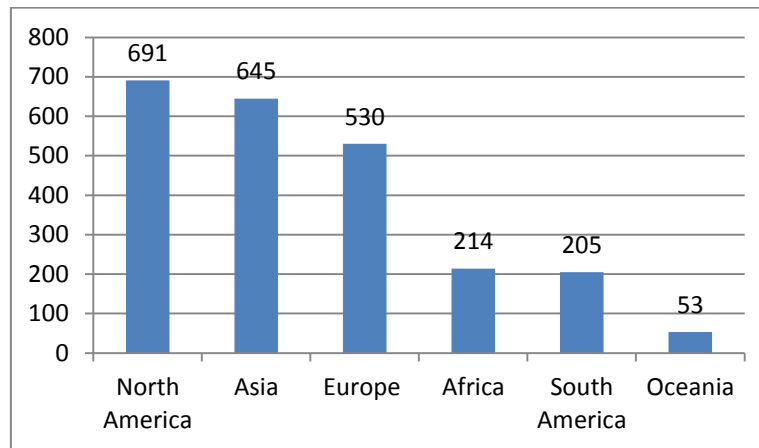


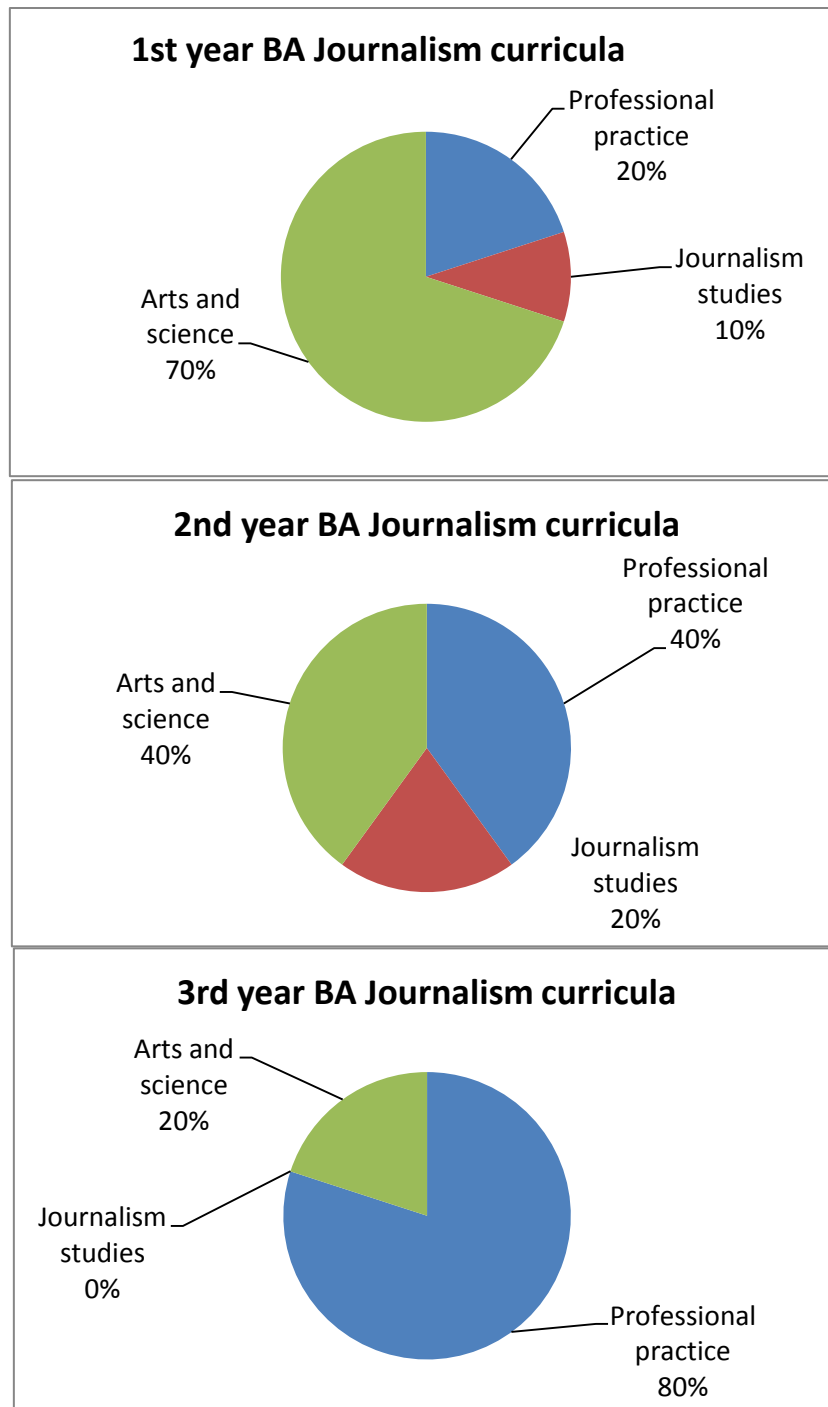
Chart 1. Journalism programs worldwide  
(processed from **World Journalism Education Census** database, 2010)

### **Journalism curricula peculiarities**

Although the form and content of journalism education varies as a result of differences in political, social, cultural and economic environment, it has also been argued that different models establish themselves in context of shared global circumstances and that, for this reason, it is worth studying international patterns in the development of journalism education (Deuze, 2006:19).

A brief look on Journalism curricula offered by universities from different continents of the world lead to several distinctive characteristics: even if in most universities journalism is not considered a vocational program, the programs build on the US journalism education model offer a consistent amount of practical courses and practice combined with theory; some programs offer a more theoretical approach (journalism studies) while others offer a communication and journalism studies mixed system; at last, but not at least, several programs reflect the impact of new technologies on the content of curriculum and their use to teach journalism.

The UNESCO's *Model of Curricula for Journalism Education* sets a tri-dimensional approach of journalism education for the BA level: *"In a university program, the development of journalism practice (the first axis) is informed and enriched by the study of journalism in society (the second axis) and by the acquisition of the methods and content marking modern knowledge through courses in other disciplines (the third axis)."* (UNESCO, 2007:11). Furthermore, the *Model...* provides for each of the three academic years specific weights for each category: professional practice, journalism studies, arts and science.



Charts 2, 3 and 4: UNESCO model for a three year BA Journalism curricula

But journalism education is nowadays challenged by fundamental changes that affected the society over the last tens of years: the globalization, the economic crisis, and the impact of new media technologies. Patterns of both media production and consumption have profoundly changed over the last twenty-five years, being triggered by the application of new technologies and the economic circumstances. Journalism education successfully adapted to the new media technology and production techniques, but as far as the content is concerned, not much change took place over the last two decades (Stephenson, 2009:15).

After a comprehensive analysis of the media education state in Europe, Drok (2012) concludes that recent technological, social and economic developments demand *innovation*

at every level of journalism: the working process, the content of the product, the form of the product, the platform used to get the message and the profession as a whole.

Concerns	Innovation	Description
<i>I Public</i>	<b>Participation</b>	Making use of user generated content or knowledge, whether or not through social media or internet communities.
<i>II Process</i>	<b>Transparency</b>	Guaranteeing accountability and a trustworthy, open working method.
<i>III Product Content</i>	<b>Navigation</b>	Offering a relevant and reliable content, whether or not through in-depth research, and putting it in a meaningful context.
<i>IV Product Form</i>	<b>Storytelling</b>	Using narratives in an attractive and user-friendly way to weave together fragmented observations to construct meanings.
<i>V Platform</i>	<b>Crossmedia</b>	Dividing content over different media in the most effective way while stimulating interaction.
<i>VI Profession</i>	<b>Entrepreneurship</b>	Being focused on innovation of product, process and platform for the benefit of the public with regard of the economics of the profession.

Table 5. Innovation in journalism (Drok, 2012:61)

Definitely, innovation in newsrooms demands innovation in the classroom. Finberg (2013:1) considers that the future of journalism education is at a critical point for two reasons: time is running out, because disruption<sup>3</sup>, *“driven by economics and technology is coming to the university system much faster than most administrators realize”*; and *“journalism education will undergo fundamental shifts in how journalism is taught and who teaches it. Those who don’t innovate in the classroom will be left behind. Just like those who choose not to innovate in the newsroom.”*

The challenge of innovation in journalism education is not yet leading to massive change in opinions of both educators and professionals, but there are signs that a paradigmatic shift in teaching future journalists is imminent.

### Media Technology and Journalism Education

With the relatively recent shifts in media technology the very core of Journalism needs rethinking. Prominent scholars such as Manuel Castells claim that what we referred to as „mass communication” is now slowly turning into „mass self-communication” (Castells 2009) mainly due to the advent of converging media sharing and social networking platforms and the widespread use of smartphones. While the use of blogs, wikis, media-sharing platforms and social network sites and various web content management systems has permeated the journalism curricula in most schools, the emphasis on the use of new technology is not intrinsically sufficient, especially when it is associated with a poor understanding of the changing global socio-economical context.

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<sup>3</sup> The development, flow or sequence of technological innovation cannot be anticipated: forty years ago, we did not realize the first cellphone would lead to smartphones; ten years ago there was neither *Facebook*, nor *Twitter*.

While the buzz-term „Web 2.0“ was still waiting to be marketed out to unsuspecting journalism instructors and scholars worldwide, Dan Gillmor’s “We the Media” (2008) described some of the most important changes that new technologies were bringing to the field: the shift from the top-down landscape dominated by global media conglomerates or media trusts to the bottom-up, sometimes chaotic network of blogs and various content-sharing platforms where audiences were now participants.

Entrepreneurial journalism instructor and widely-acknowledged new media pundit Jeff Jarvis launched a debate over “journalism’s myth of perfection” still prophesized by the “Big Media” and still being taught in most Journalism schools. In (Jarvis 2009) he argues that we are now witnessing a clash between competing business models in the media – the *content economy* versus the *link economy*, and even more importantly “a clash over journalistic culture and methods – product journalism v. process journalism”. The concept of *process journalism* refers to constructing news as it develops, as new information comes in, allowing the audience to participate, to contribute. The model described by Jarvis is close to what the software/services industry majors refers to as releasing “a beta”. While this new model, first used by bloggers and later adopted by some journalists, is still often criticized by traditionalists who claim that an imperfect story should not be released, it is a model that redefines the roles associated to journalists and their stories in the contemporary computer mediated, networked social context. Thus the story becomes more of a conversation starter, than an authoritative report on a current issue with greater emphasis on timeliness and audience participation. The journalist moves from gatekeeper to information broker. In trying to explain why online journalism develops as it does, scholars have found that online journalism is somehow left behind by the developments brought by new media and that it often features linear text, little participation, although journalists seem enthusiastic about these forms (Steenenson 2011). This suggests that just looking at the form of online journalism as the most significant change might not be enough.

Recent research into the *process journalism* model as a viable option for Journalism school curricula emphasizes three main strands for teaching and learning activities (Robinson 2013):

- **Production Transport/Transaction:** engaging the audience in story conception via social media, networked journalism and crowd-sourcing stories, writing for specific audiences and not for a specific medium, entrepreneurial approaches and innovation.
- **Content Transport/Transaction:** using digital focus groups, story-in-progress blogs, providing links to other information sources, writing follow-ups, Q&A sessions, using interactive graphics, referencing other authored sources, aggregating information.
- **Audience Transport/Transaction:** learning about alternative aggregation spaces like Reddit, Twitter or BuzzFeed, YouTube, Facebook, monitoring post-publication discussions, fixing misimpressions, acting as facilitators for conversations started by the story.

### Journalism competences for 21<sup>st</sup> century

In the context of worldwide radical technological, social and economic changes, journalism curricula should be adapted in order to provide graduates with skills and competences that could answer the professional challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

European Journalism Training Association (EJTA) released in 2006 the Tartu Declaration, a document which stated what journalism students should be learned. But due to a rapidly changing environment, in 2013 the EJTA members adopted a revised Tartu Declaration, with a newer qualification profile<sup>4</sup>. When briefly compared to its earlier version, one can see that adding or removing words, expressions or even competences/skills reflect the position of European journalism educators towards changes.

For example, the competences that refer to journalism's role in society become more specific by adding at 1.1 the word *democratic*, which provides a special emphasize on the journalists' commitment to Western values in the context of recent Arab uprisings and other international events. Thus, the text states that [the journalist should] "*have a commitment to democratic society*". Furthermore, journalism is not considered anymore to focus only on local events, but there is an increasing need to "*link the local with the national and the global*" (1.5), to provide context for the events (2.1), "*to stimulate broad participation in debate*" (2.5).

The competence to gather information swiftly (4) previously indicated that journalists should "*be able to use all required sources effectively*" (2.1), and to "*have the ability to balance the stories*" (2.2) but the 2013 version express that journalists should "*Be able to find multiple perspectives on an issue*" (2.1), and "*be able to evaluate sources*" (2.2), which might be interpreted as a response to the flood of information of which reliability and quality should be verified and evaluated by journalists, as the fifth competence [to select the essential information] states. Changes compared to the 2006 Tartu Declaration may be noticed when talking about ability to select information on the basis of relevance (5.3) and to select information in accordance with the media platform (5.4). It is interesting to see that the notion of *genre* is replaced by *media platform*, which raise the question of traditional journalistic genres relevance in the context of media convergence<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Revised Tartu Qualification Profile 2013:

1. The competence to reflect on journalism's role in society.
2. The competence to find relevant issues and angles.
3. The competence to organize journalistic work.
4. The competence to gather information swiftly.
5. The competence to select the essential information.
6. The competence to present information in an effective journalistic form.
7. The competence to account for journalistic work.
8. The competence to cooperate in a team.
9. The competence to act as an entrepreneurial journalist.
10. The competence to contribute to the renewal of the profession.

<sup>5</sup> Defined as "the realm of possibilities when cooperation occurs between print and broadcast for the delivery of multimedia content through the use of computers and the Internet." (Lawson-Borders, 2006:4).

The effect of “*sharing and cross-promoting content from a variety of media, some interactive, through newsroom collaborations and partnerships*” (Missouri Group, cited in Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2004) entangled a radical transformation in the 2013 Tartu Declaration. Thus the former “*competence to structure information in a journalistic manner*” (6. - 2006) merged with “*The competence to present information in an effective journalistic form*” (7. - 2006) under the latter name. This competence relies on outstanding linguistic competence (6.1); good visual competence (6.2); ability to use different types of story-telling techniques (6.3), to present content in effective combinations of words, sounds and visuals (6.4) and to make journalistic use of technology (6.5). It becomes obvious that the 21<sup>st</sup> journalist needs technical and multimedia and production skills in order to present his work in an attractive and comprehensive form.

Critical thinking, innovation and entrepreneurial skills are key aspects of the new direction in Journalism education worldwide. The revised Tartu Declaration emphasizes reflectivity, problem-solving, initiative and the ability to develop new products or formats. While the older versions of this document mentioned the ability to collaborate with technicians, the 2013 revision clearly states that journalists themselves should be able to make use of technology efficiently.

All the changes proposed by the 2013 Tartu Declaration show that journalism educators and trainers from Europe keep pace with the media developments and try to bring together teaching and practice.

The very same idea is sustained by Poynter Institute for Media Studies, which recently launched a *Competencies survey* (2013:21-22), in order to get opinions from both educators and professionals about what they think is important for beginning journalists who look toward a career in the digital/mobile age. The competences and skills are grouped in four categories, each containing several indicators:

1. **Knowledge, attitudes and personal features** (curiosity; accuracy; handles stress, deadlines and criticism well; have broad general knowledge; have good social skills; be a team player; be acquainted with journalistic ethics; knowledge of other cultures; knowledge of government; understand the media landscape; be familiar with copyright and journalism laws; have knowledge of the business of media; have good news judgment; have knowledge of current events; select information based on reliability; be a team leader; ability to embrace change and innovation).
2. **News gathering skills** (analyze and synthesize large amounts of data; network, make contact and develop sources; search online information on an advanced level; master interview techniques; search for news and check sources without the use of the Internet; look at news with a historical perspective; interpret statistical data and graphics).
3. **News production skills** (storytelling; write in a fluent style; write using correct grammar; master various forms of journalistic writing; understand audience expectations and needs; speaking skills).

4. **Technical and multimedia production skills** (ability to work with HTML or other computer languages; shoot and edit video; shoot and edit photographs; record and edit audio; ability to tell stories with design and visuals).

The survey design shows without any doubt that an increasing preoccupation for how the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be trained and should perform in rapidly changing technological and economic environment.

While multimedia skills have been stressed out by the Journalism school curricula, some authors claim that *“the model of journalism, taught in journalism schools and run as a business by news organizations, has remained unchanged for many decades”* and just adding multimedia and using new storytelling techniques or delivering the product over the Internet doesn't change the basic model (Mensing 2010). A considerable number of scholars advocate a change from the industry-centred journalism education model now taught in most schools to a *community centred model*. This model stresses alternatives to professionalism seen as either a source of ethical motivation or a source of power, networked journalism skills by taking into account the collaborative nature of contemporary journalism, by professionals and amateurs working together to develop the story, the creation and development of communities of inquiry in journalism schools and integrating research done in universities with the practical training the undergraduate students receive (Mensing 2010).

### **Journalism education in Romania**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the first journalism programs were inspired by the French model. During communism, the Soviet model was used to teach and train future ideology and propaganda vectors. After December 1989, the US model was adopted by most of the journalism schools. As strange it may seem, journalism education was during the 20<sup>th</sup> century tributary to three different models, which may be qualified in the same time confusing and enriching.

In Romania, the competences grid for the journalism programs was elaborated in 2011, within the framework of DOCIS, a European SOPHRD project. The five main professional competences are established as follows:

- C1. Identification and use of communication sciences' terminology, methodologies and specialized knowledge.
- C2. Use of new technologies of information and communication (NTIC).
- C3. Describe different types of audiences.
- C4. Media information management.
- C5. Identify and use specific media deontology and social responsibility.
- C6. Produce a journalistic content (text, video, audio and photography) for all media platforms.

Romanian journalism educators are grouped since 2007 in the Journalism and Communication Educators Association (Asociația Formatorilor din Jurnalism și Comunicare - AFCOM), but this organism is not a very active player of the Romanian journalism education



landscape. Therefore, one might say that the modernization of the journalism education relies rather on the human resources than on an institutional trend setter, like the European Journalism Training Association, Center for Independent Journalism, Poynter Institute for Media Studies, Knight Rider Foundation etc.

Over the last 5 years, the Journalism Department at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, has made a series of curricular developments aimed at bringing the educational process closer to the needs of the would-be journalists and the current market demands:

Rather than introducing students to the traditional and online media progressively, over the course of the 3-year Bachelor program (from print press and photojournalism to radio, TV and finally online journalism) the curricula now addresses the basics of each of the main media simultaneously in first-year courses. Also, in trying to develop critical thinking and reflective practices in the context of contemporary media culture, new courses, such as Journalism and Popular Culture, Media Analysis and New Media Theory were introduced. These courses aim at offering a deeper, more contextualized understanding of the relationships between media professionals, media products, media technologies/distribution platforms and the public (or unknown networked publics). In an attempt to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship, a final-year course in Online Communication was introduced. During this course, students are encouraged to work in teams and develop a website in real-world conditions, promote it using any means, come up with new approaches, new ideas and compete with each-other over a two-month period. Some of these student projects have been successfully continued by the students and have had noticeable visibility.

### SWOT Analysis – Curricula Development in Romanian Journalism Schools

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalism education is a dynamic, young field</li> <li>• Journalism schools may become incubators for innovative approaches</li> <li>• Universities generally encourage interdisciplinary collaboration with computer science or business school students</li> <li>• Present curricula shifts towards increased integration of multimedia skills</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict legal framework for curricula development in public higher education institutions</li> <li>• Curricula development is sometimes greatly influenced by individual needs, not organizational/national policy</li> <li>• Low funding for technical infrastructure and practical extra-mural activities</li> <li>• Present curricula does not stress critical thinking</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leapfrogging in terms of technology access of general population</li> <li>• Integration in EHEA</li> <li>• Media institutions are looking for new</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An increasing number of media institutions offering journalism training, but only focusing on instant gratification of trainees</li> <li>• Governmental educational policy is</li> </ul>

approaches and new business models <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalism students are tech-savvy and increasingly inclined towards innovation and entrepreneurial approaches</li> <li>• The Big Media institutional system is not as strongly established</li> </ul>	unpredictable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A significant number of students look for instant gratification at entry-level</li> </ul>
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## Conclusion

Over the last decade there have been several directions that aimed to align journalism education with the newest developments in media technology. Perhaps the most important trends are the ever increased focus on training general-purpose multimedia skills, a return to prominence of critical thinking competencies through traditional academic/research training and a big shift towards encouraging innovation in production practices, content forms and distribution means coupled with the training of entrepreneurial skills aimed at coping with the fact that the number of Journalism graduates who start working in traditional newsrooms is declining in favour of those who decide to work as freelancers or develop their own Web start-up.

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