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About the necessity to create communication and mass media studies as an academic branch in Poland

Is it possible that absent from the official index, accredited by the Central Commission on Academic Degrees and Titles supporting the education process of several thousand students in this country, could be a field of study being taught in various higher education institutions? It appears to be so, since this is exactly the situation with regard to those studying “journalism and social communication”, present on nearly 40 different public and private higher education schools in Poland. In addition, journalism is taught, informally in dozens of Polish universities and colleges as part of philology, sociology, psychology, economy and even sport studies.

As mentioned above, it is several dozen thousand people, formally educated in other fields of study as well as a growing number of professors (today nearly a 100 are academic researchers, post doctoral studies and titular professors who openly state that they wish to be officially part of this new, however, not yet official field of study). The situation is different with regard to fields such as sociology, psychology, history, chemistry, physics, economy or biology. It often happens so that even highly specialist fields within a particular major are official, as is so in case of law or administration.

Another question is, Is this normal? And the answer is short and simple – NO! It is not right to ignore the needs of this growing academic circle, active in its research and work in order to meet the needs of an increasing number of students in this dynamically growing, in quantity and quality field of study which is “journalism and social communication”¹.

In Poland (and abroad) journalist education on the academic level is increasingly popular. The beginnings date back to 1908 in the United States where first students were educated in this field². Poland, along with Germany, were one of the first European countries to teach journalism so it can be said that we have a long and rich tradition in this field. This is

¹ On the need to create a separate field of study and activities regarding this matter (also in the historic context) see Jan Załubski, *Komu potrzebne jest prasoznawstwo*, [in:] *Media i medioznawstwo. Studia i szkice*, Toruń 2006, p. 11 and on.

² See the discussion on journalism in higher education schools, “Journalism. Theory, Practice and Criticism” Vol. 1 (April 2000), No. 1, p. 9–29.

another argument for demanding that these increasingly popular disciplines of journalism, mass media and social communication be properly indexed³.

What is more, we are presently dealing with constantly growing interest in this field, at the bachelor and the master degree level, and very soon (as the Bologna system has created new opportunities) on the doctoral level. Because of this there is an urgent need to increase the number of academic staff (“journalism and social communication” has for years been particularly popular with students in Poland) as well as to create (formally) a new (but in fact in existence for years) academic discipline. It should also be noted that presently doctoral students have practically no chance to continue in their field since “journalism and social communication” are, so far, only first (bachelor) and second (master) level studies. This ‘new-old’ status needs to be regulated since the National Accreditation Commission has got their demands with regard to academic professors teaching this discipline.

Undoubtedly, there are increasingly close relations between research on journalism as a profession and research on mass media as they are tools which the researchers use in their daily professional activity but also as the process of communication itself, of which an integral part are mass media means and people who work for them. This is another argument for demanding to officially recognize this field of study, in order to unite research in these fields.

There is another issue which should be pointed out, that is the existing terminological confusion (also in Western countries) in this, so far unofficial (hopefully temporarily) in Poland, field of study. There is a multitude of names and specializations within this academic and research discipline⁴. The most popular are: *journalism studies*, *media studies*, *film and television studies*, *performing arts*, *media and production studies*, *communication studies* (or *mass communication studies*), or (partly) *cultural studies*. All of the above are widely used regarding the proliferation of knowledge on mass media, communication and journalism, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, referring to education on the academic level and to research.

The need of this discipline to find its identity is undeniable, especially since it has been in existence for years. It should be an absolutely normal and uncontroversial matter. The thematic spectrum of this not precisely defined field of study is particularly wide, including the history of media and journalism, its sociology, legal regulations of mass media, language

³ For more see *Media i dziennikarstwo na przełomie wieków. Materials from an international academic conference, Warszawa, June, 1997*, ed. by J. Adamowski, Warszawa 1998.

⁴ See the British index of higher education fields of study. *Media 08: The Essentials guide to the changing media landscape*, ed. by J. Gibson, London 2008, p. 381–385.

aspects of its activity, the influence of media on socio-political and economic spheres and an in-depth analysis of the process of communication on culture, politics and business. Research field opportunities in this area are broad, hence, there is much room for different types of research to be carried out.

Additionally, there seems to be a solid base enabling studies in this discipline. There are numerous places, and new ones being created, where education of future journalists and social communication specialists takes place. There are relatively large university centres in Gdansk, Cracow, Katowice, Lublin, Poznan, Warsaw and Wroclaw (and a new one in Torun). Most of the above are entitled to educate students up to the master's level as well as to promote doctoral and post-graduate students and to confer titles of academic professors. Mass media are such an attractive field of research that they are of interest to representatives of many fields of study (i.e. economists, historians, linguists, lawyers, psychologists and sociologists). However, vague are criteria which allow for the classification of these people into such a wide discipline as are mass media and mass communication studies. The only existent qualifier seems to be the National Accreditation Commission which has a basis for qualifying academic "journalism and social communication" teachers based on the achievements and accreditation supplied by him (or an institution) in the field of the carried out research.

It should also be noted that this formally inexistent field of study has its own methodology base, borrowed from other humanistic and social (ie. history, sociology) studies, which is continually being developed and improved. It possesses, which is imperative, its own long-running research tradition dating back to XIX century with studies on printed press. It has also acquired extended literature on the subject, with re-prints of Western researchers' studies but also its own, original works created by numerous mass media, journalism and communication research circles. These works, numbering in hundreds per year, are in the form of monographs and academic articles published in discipline periodicals (among which the most well known are: the Cracow quarterly "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" and the Warsaw quarterly "Studia Medioznawcze", celebrating this year its 10th anniversary), as part of special publication series (such as Edukacja Medialna [Media Education] by the renowned Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, or Nauka o Komunikowaniu [Science of Communication] by Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, or other prints by distinguished publishing houses such as Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN).

These types of works are also being increasingly printed by academic publishers, such as the above mentioned publication series Media by the Jagiellonian University publishing

house or an analogous series by the Wroclaw University publisher. There are also dozens of other works printed by smaller, often private publishers (in Warsaw there is ASPRA-JR publishing for Warsaw's media studies circles and Elipsa). It can be said that this circle is extremely active and looking for opportunities for further academic development, also according to modern day trends since mass media and communication studies are becoming increasingly popular world wide (making their way into the traditionally very conservative old universities such as Cambridge).

To sum up, it needs to be stated that there is a great need to formally regulate (include it in the index of academic disciplines in Poland) this field of study, possibly under the name "science of communication and mass media" (it is just a proposal agreed upon by several people, although widely discussed in media studies circles). There are hundreds of other students in agreement as they often have unnecessary difficulties in defending their dissertation or habilitation theses as part of philology, political science or social studies.

Perhaps it should also be mentioned that the official index of academic disciplines in Poland does include a field which (in a way) may be considered similar to the postulated media and communication studies – that is *science of cognition and communication*. In practice, however, it is far from and different from the one in question (although closely tied to means of public broadcasting, journalism and social communication) that it seems to be more closely tied to culture studies. It definitely does not meet media circles' expectations, for which this postulate was written. We have great hope that this issue will be positively considered, for the benefit of Polish academic circles and science. It would be a great satisfaction to hundreds of Polish mass media, journalism and social communication researchers, also possessing their own academic circle organization.