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Can journalist and social communication studies become independent?

It is worth to take some time and ponder whether journalism and social communication can and should become an independent field of study. This question could also be formulated another way – should this discipline be formally accredited? – one which already exists in Poland and has been dynamically developing for the past 20 years, as can be seen based on research intensity, number of publications and the massive scale of practical use.

Should this discipline be academically legitimized, as it functions as an independent field of study in other countries (i.e. in the US – as Communication and Journalism, in Western European countries as *Medienwissenschaft*, *Kommunikations Wissenschaft*) and continues to be one of the most dynamically expanding academic disciplines. Despite the above, in Poland it does not exist as an autonomous field of study.

The need to create an independent academic discipline

Since 1917, available in Poland are various types of journalism studies. In 1995, the Higher Education Council named these studies “Journalism and Social Communication”. The studies are available on the bachelor and master level. This is not in accordance with the Bologna system, which is to provide three level education in all academic fields. Third level doctoral studies are not offered in this field for the obvious reason that it is not an officially accredited discipline. Journalism and social communication studies continue to be among the most popular with students, topping the rankings in terms of new candidates year after year. One example – at Gdansk University in the academic year 2006/2007 there was the largest amount of candidates per one spot in the entire Tri City area for two continuous years, and in 2009 – journalism was in second place, right after dentistry at the medical school.

There are journalism and media studies specializations available as part of political science, philology and sociology faculties. Also, almost every school with this specialization offers post graduate studies in this area. According to the National Accreditation Committee, journalism and media studies are offered in over 40 higher education schools in Poland, both

public and private. In over 28 schools (mainly public) available are bachelor level studies and in 12 (public) – both, bachelor and master level.

This means that there are several hundred academic teachers working in this field and this number is growing. The minimum number of staff for the schools is 455 people¹ but this number applies to only part of those employed in different schools to meet minimum standards. Let's take, for example, the leading schools in this field. At Warsaw University's Journalism Institute employed are 70 people, at Jagiellonian University – 27, at Mickiewicz University in Poznan – 23. According to National Accreditation Committee (also University Accreditation Committee), these people need to possess proper academic degrees and titles in order to work there. The criterion to teach journalism and social communication states that one needs to have scholarly achievements in the area of media studies and social communication². The fact is that there is a great number of research and work done in this area, inspired by the development of journalist education. Every year there are hundreds of doctoral and post graduate papers as well as books on media and social communication. When it comes to awarding academic degrees and titles, these are decided by committees from philology, history, political science and also sometimes sociology, pedagogy and psychology institutes. These assessing committees generally apply strict criteria regarding research methods. They look at the subject matter from the perspective of their own discipline and, at times, question the fact that various research methods, common in their field of study, may not apply here. The issue is – why should we award someone a doctorate in the field of history, literature, political science or history if his/her work does not strictly apply to the discipline's methodology? This is a difficult problem which hinders progress in improving the academic teachers base in this field.

For the purposes of journalism education established have been new publishing series which distribute textbooks on the subject (i.e. Edukacja Medialna edited by Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Edukacja Medialna under the auspices of Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne Spółka Akcyjna, Dziennikarstwo i Świat Mediów published by Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas and edited by Studium Dziennikarskie Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego im. Komisji Edukacji Narodowej in Cracow). There are also academic publications by Journalism Institutes at Warsaw University,

¹ According to PKA, this number May not be precise as not all schools report in a timely fashion the introduction of these studies.

² Cf. Resolution No 1043/2004 by PKA from October 28, 2004 on the regulations of inspections (uniform text taking into consideration changes by Resolution No 974 from December 13, 2007) "Report by PKA team assessing...", Part IV Academic teachers, p. 3 and 5.

Jagiellonian University, Wrocław University and A. Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Astrum from Wrocław, in the *Kreatywność* series, publishes both foreign and Polish authors' works on media and social communication.

Recently, published have also been lexicographic works on the subject such as *Popularna encyklopedia mass mediów* [Mass Media Encyclopedia]³, *Słownik terminologii medialnej* [Media Terminology Dictionary]⁴ and many others.

Increasingly developing research on media is due to their growing influence on political, social, economic and cultural spheres of life. In terms of socio-political life, media's so called "fourth power" can often even be called "first power"⁵, with people often stating that "politicians can be killed by a newspaper". All this is tied to the functioning of democratic country mechanisms, where access to information, public debate and control over public life structures play a vital role.

Mechanisms of social communication are also fundamental in the stimulation of research on interpersonal, group, public and institutional communication. It can be said that communication skills, especially in the sphere of political life, are key. These are issues particularly interesting to theoreticians but also to those who use them in practice. Among the latter, there are some, like Piotr Tymochowicz, who have become real stars.

Another stimulus of research in this area is the specificity of the functioning of economic life in the system of free market economy. This is due to the obvious fact that media are a fundamental channel of broadcasting advertising content. Hence, there is enormous development in research on press readership as well as radio, TV and Internet audience figures. It has resulted in the establishment of several dozen agencies specializing in research on media influence and taking mass media means into consideration in their research⁶.

There is great interest in the field of journalism and social communication because of its versatility. This discipline prepares people not only to be press, radio, TV or new media journalists but also (depending on the specialization) for other professions such as press secretaries, media managers, public relations, media, advertising and promotion specialists, local media organizers, information policy specialists, photography designers, media and

³ *Popularna encyklopedia mass mediów*, ed. by J. Skrzypczak, Poznań 1999.

⁴ *Słownik terminologii medialnej*, ed. by W. Pisarek, Kraków 2006.

⁵ Cf. *Media w Polsce. Pierwsza władza IV RP?*, ed. by M. Sokołowski, Warszawa 2007.

⁶ For example, market research and opinion agencies: Opinia – market research agency, ARC Rynek i Opinia sp. z o.o., GfK Polonia, Millward Brown SMG/KRC; public relations agencies: Agencja GREEN PR, DEVA, Public Relations, GENESIS Public Relations, ITBC Communication sp. z o.o., Martis CONSULTING sp. z o.o., Multi Communications sp. z o.o., Neuron Agencja Public Relations, PREMIUM Public Relations sp. z o.o., PRS/Andrzej Multanowski.

advertising photographers, political marketing specialists, etc. All this indicates a growing need to acknowledge this discipline as an independent field of study and to officially register it as a science.

Research development (cognitive aspects and directions) and the discipline's methodological instruments

It can be said that any discipline's academic status can be determined by its cognitive aspect, the level of research development, its methodological instruments and bibliographic achievements.

It was in the 1960s when the first research plane and directions were established. The discipline then was referred to as press studies, in existence for quite some time, dating back to the XIX century when Bentkowski, Chłędowski i Bandtkie⁷ initiated research on the history of Polish press writing.

In the post-war period, Warsaw's Polish Press Studies Institute, active between 1946-49, was in charge on research on mass media means. However, it was the creation of Cracow based Centre of Press Research RSW "Prasa" and its Department of Theory and Practice with a focus on methodological research (i.e. I. Tetelowska's work on issues of press quantity analysis, adapting French researcher, Jacques Kayser's theories)⁸ which resulted in progress on research in this field. It was the Centre's initiative to establish numerous publishing series.

Polish research on media (press studies then) research methodology resulted in several important publications. Imperative then were initiatives by UW's Journalism Institute (est. in 1953). Between 1960s and 1970s, it initiated work on methodological aspects of research on mass information means. As a result, published was the three volume *Metody i techniki badawcze w prasoznawstwie* [Press studies research methods and techniques]⁹, with a goal to present "the entirety of press studies methodological issues as a newly established discipline of social studies"¹⁰. It was prepared by a team of leading researchers (also practitioners) from various academic centres in Poland, mostly from Warsaw and Cracow. Mieczysław Kafel was the head of the team.

⁷ F. Bentkowski, *Historia literatury polskiej, wystawiona w spisie dzieł drukiem ogłoszonych*, Warszawa–Wilno 1814, vol. 1, part 1, p. 125–133; A.T. Chłędowski, *O początkowych pismach periodycznych w języku polskim*, "Pamiętnik Lwowski", 1816, vol. 1, p. 121–133; J.P. Bandtkie, *Wiadomość krótka o gazetach polskich*, "Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego z Uniwersytetem Krakowskim Połączonym" 1819, p. 205–224.

⁸ M. Kafel, *Prasoznawstwo. Wstęp do problematyki*. 2nd ed., Warszawa 1969, p. 83–85.

⁹ *Metody i techniki badawcze w prasoznawstwie*. vol. 1–3, ed. by M. Kafel, Warszawa 1969–1971.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 4.

Earlier, in 1966, he published the first among Polish works on mass media means academic textbook, *Prasoznawstwo. Wstęp do problematyki* [Press Studies. Introductory Issues]¹¹, which included a characterization of Polish and foreign research on mass information means and journalism education. In it, he delineated the goals and subject matter of press studies directions and departments of research as well as a review of research methods used in the field.

The work created a plane for the exchange of thoughts and opinions on issues related to the discipline. This was particularly visible in the book's review, by Tetelowska, published in Cracow's "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" and entitled, *Polska koncepcja prasoznawstwa* [Polish concept of press studies]¹². Tetelowska polemicized with the integrative concept of press studies research presented by the author¹³.

What was characteristic of work on research methodology then was the focus on the functioning of the mass information means system, predominantly with regard to press, in accordance with progress of media at that period of time. It was when the specific to media studies method of press quantity analysis was developed. Its adapters in Poland were the above mentioned Irena Tetelowska and Mieczysław Kafel. Similarly, adapted then was also Jacques Kayser's method of measuring press material visibility.

Research back then was largely determined by the existing political system in Poland, nevertheless, it paved the way and provided a base for further research on mass communication means.

1989 was a break-through year for this discipline. It was characterized by extremely dynamic development of journalism education as well as research on the system of functioning and the influence of mass media means. It was when the term press studies was increasingly being replaced by the term media studies. This was due to the fact that audiovisual media were becoming increasingly dominant and the onset of the Internet which quickly advanced to become an independent medium. This development was characteristic to the situation related to the function which autonomous media play in a democratic society.

¹¹ M. Kafel, *Prasoznawstwo. Wstęp do problematyki*, Warszawa 1966.

¹² I. Tetelowska, *Polska koncepcja prasoznawstwa*, "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" 1968, No 1, p. 90–97, review of M. Kafel's book, *Prasoznawstwo...*, Warszawa 1966.

¹³ Tetelowska writes, „Since the author states that, »Press studies should incorporate all phenomena and processes taking place in Press reality «, he is postulating something that is impossible for one discipline since these are processes of different nature, from technical, employment and economic to creative. To postulate that this discipline play an integrative role is also unacceptable from a methodological point of view. Integration of sciences in the era of enormous specialization is a method which is often (not always successfully) applied but there is not one discipline which could integrate so much”, *ibidem*.

The situation was similar regarding the progress of research on other forms of social communication. Free market economy, new mechanisms of functioning of political life and new forms of social relations have stimulated the development of a new discipline in Poland, one in existence in the West for quite some time.

In this situation, imperative to the progress of Polish research were works by Western academics such as Harold Lasswell, Bernard Berelson, Marshall McLuhan, Paul Lazarsfeld, Carl Hovland, Willbur Schramm and others. Also the research plane was significantly expanded. Aside from media studies issues (media history, legal, political and social determinants of media functioning, media organization and economy, media functions and influence, media language, media reception, journalist education and genres, etc.), there were also social communication issues.

As a result, marked was a significant increase in the amount of works published on the subject. According to the Centre of Press Studies Research from Cracow, between 1996–2001¹⁴ published were about 7 000 works, including articles and doctoral papers printed in various academic periodicals and opinion weeklies. In order to better imagine the scale of the phenomenon, it should be noted that after 2001 there was an exponentially greater amount of works published. Every year since, on the market appeared several dozen publications. Polish readers now have also access to the majority of leading Western works on the subject¹⁵.

Among media studies periodicals there are “Zeszyty Prasoznawcze” (est. in 1956), “Studia Medioznawcze” (since 2000), “Media i Marketing” (since 1993), “Press” (since 1996), Polish edition of “Global Media Journal” (since 2006), “Rocznik Prasoznawczy” (since 2007), “Rocznik Bibliologiczno-Prasoznawczy” (since 1993) and others.

Lately, the development of audiovisual media, including the so called “new media” and especially the Internet, have also influenced the methodology of media studies research. As far as the Internet, in Poland most popular is “gemiusTraffic”¹⁶, while in case of the audiovisual media market – “Radiomonitor”, “telemetric research”, “Interbus” and others¹⁷.

Research on media and social communication is definitely interdisciplinary in character. It is carried out in symbiosis with “adjacent disciplines” such as political science, history, sociology, psychology, linguistics, law and economy. This is because in order to

¹⁴ W.M. Kolasa, J. Jarowiecki, *Polska bibliografia prasoznawcza 1996–2001*, Kraków 2005, p. 21–22.

¹⁵ For example: M. McLuhan, *Zrozumieć media. Przedłużenie człowieka*, Warszawa 2004; D. McQuail, *Teoria komunikowania masowego*, Warszawa 2007.

¹⁶ Regarding: number of users, visits, length of visit, number of entrances, links, geo-localization, technical data.

¹⁷ In Poland this research is done by two international groups: Taylor Nelson Sofres (Polish representative TNS OBOP – specialization – Radiomonitor, telemetric research TNS OBOP, Interbus, consumer index) and Kantor (Polish representatives Millward Brown SMG/KRC and AGB Polska – specialization: Press Track, Radio Track, Net-Track, telemetric research).

research the functioning of media and the process of social communication, one needs to take into consideration their political/ideological dependencies and influence on political life, the process of historical development, media reception, specificity of language shape and form and its influence on effectiveness of broadcast, restrictions on media independence and, most importantly, the economic/financial determinants of their existence.

Chronologically, this discipline is most closely tied to history. The first research and publications on press history, which date back to early XIX century¹⁸, were parallel to its dynamic development and growing influence on shaping public opinion. Research methods used then were source analysis and criticism, writing analysis and criticism and content analysis. One proof that press history research was closely connected to history is the fact that in Poland until the 1970s it was considered to be auxiliary to history studies¹⁹.

The development of press quantity as well as the proliferation of radio and television, and later on Internet's global scope determined its symbiosis with sociological studies. Market demand for data regarding press, radio, TV and Internet perception resulted in widespread adoption of statistical methods as well as field research.

The advancement of advertising and the popularity of political marketing resulted in a greater demand for language research and, hence, increased interest of linguists in analysis of media output. This research, initiated in the 1970s by Walery Pisarek and others, went way beyond just practical advice such as "what to write/say in order to..." and presently are very advanced theoretically and analytically, making use of most modern linguistic methods (linguistic pragmatics, cognitivism). There is research in the area of genology (on particular genres of media), pragma-linguistic analysis of media discourse and on persuasion techniques used in media communication (languages of politics and advertising). In the last area, linguistic research closely cooperates with psychological sciences. The language of media (or language in media, according to Pisarek) has become a separate area of research, as can be seen based on various publications on the subject, such as Wrocław's series *Nowe Media* (est. in 2005), *Nowe w Mediach* or *Język w mediach masowych* (ed. by J. Bralczyk and K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska, Warszawa 2000) or *Tekst w mediach* (ed. by K. Michalewski, Łódź 2002).

Financial determinants of media functioning in the area

¹⁸ R. Preutz, *Geschichte des deutschen Journalismus*, Hannover 1845, from M. Kafel, *Prasoznawstwo...* 2nd ed., p. 30.

¹⁹ See textbook by P. Szymanski. It was in this textbook that press studies have ceased to be auxiliary in history research., J. Szymański, *Nauki pomocnicze historii*, Warszawa 1983.

of journalism and social communication

Although enormous development of journalism studies has been noted, their financial need are being ignored by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Days when journalism could be taught with a reporter's notebook and a tape recorder are long gone. Today, journalism requires complex and expensive education equipment. This is due to electronic revolution that has taken place in all media, traditional (press, radio and television) as well as modern (Internet and its derivatives). As far as the press, it is the computerization process of newspaper editing and printing, electronic access to sources of information and electronic transmission of photography. Such equipment is necessary in order to prepare a student for work in this field. It means that every student should have access to online and digital photography labs. Regarding TV and radio, it also means a proper number of work stations where sound and audiovisual recording can take place. All of the above requires very modern and expensive computer programmes²⁰. The same situation is as far as experimental sciences which also require a costly laboratory base.

All this determines the number of students who can be properly educated. Each one must have access to computer terminals equipped with appropriate programmes for online journalism workshops, photography studios (chemical and digital), workstations for sound recording in a radio studio and visual recording in a television studio.

Fast paced media progress definitely has an impact on the cost of journalism studies. The money available today per student does not stand the test time. These students should be treated comparably to those studying experimental disciplines.

Conclusion

Reality cannot go unnoticed and be ignored. The role of media and mechanisms determining interpersonal contact in today's world are so imperative that they do require in-depth academic observation and analysis. It is absolutely essential that this discipline is formally acknowledged as an independent field of study, especially since for years it has been

²⁰ For example, Gdansk University journalism online lab is equipped with 10 computers i Mac 20 (Core 2 Duo 2.4 Ghz processor, RAM 4 GB, hard disc 80 GB and LCD 17 monitor) and one i Mac 24. Computers are equipped with specialist programming for press, radio and television labs (Adobe Premiere Pro CS 3, Creative Suite 3 Design Standard PL, Quark X Press 7 Passport, Corel Annual CLC for Higher Education, Sound Studio 3.0, Final Cut Studio 2, MS Office 2007). There are also two Epson EMP 83 projectors with remote control systems. Approximate cost of equipping such a lab is 200 000 zł. To equip a photo lab (analogue and digital) – 400 000 zł. To buy equipment for a radio studio Reed is 800 000 zł, and television 0 3.5-4 mln zł. And this is just a starting point as additional are building and room maintenance costs, programme updates, equipment maintenance, repairs, reagents, staff, etc. These estimate are based on costs for labs at Gdansk University Institute of Social Sciences in a new building at the Baltic Campus, Gdansk-Oliwa, Bażyńskiego St. 4.

in existence researching related issues. It is entirely indispensable in order to keep up with the times and maintain proper standards in the future.