

*Crisis Events in Public Service Television Broadcasts:
Comparative Analysis of Polish and Swedish News Programmes
after the Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan*

KEY WORDS

television news, Sweden, crisis events, tsunami, public service media

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to compare reports concerning the tsunami in Japan from March 2011 in the two main Polish and Swedish public television news programmes: *Wiadomości* and *Rapport*. This comparative analysis is an attempt to answer the question of how these public institutions, which have similar goals concerning information policy, fulfil their mission during crisis events. The analysis presented in the article takes three research perspectives into account: media ethics – primarily reliability, objectivity and emotional involvement of journalists; presenting extraordinary events as a spectacle and infotainment and media communication in crisis situations.

The largest earthquake in terms of magnitude in the history of Japan, with the strength of 8,9 on the Richter scale, took place on March 11th 2011. After it came, a tsunami wave flooded large areas north of the country. A few days after the disaster, half a million people lived in temporary accommodation, while a month later the number of casualties was estimated at over thirteen thousand¹. One day after the catastrophe, March 12th, media around the world informed about the explosion in one of the Japanese nuclear power plants, Fukushima Daiichi. The tsunami wave damaged its power system, which caused a failure in the cooling of the reactor and in consequence, could have lead to the melting of the core, a substantial contamination of the area and more casualties. During the following days, the world watched the struggling of Tepco, the company managing the power plant, to suppress the spill of dangerous radioactive substances. The evacuation zone on March 12th expanded to an

¹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12709598 [accessed: 18.04.2011].

exclusion radius of 30 km around the power plant; tens of thousands of people were evacuated².

For nearly a week, the events in Japan took center stage in media world-wide. The aim of this article is to compare reports of this catastrophe in two main news programmes in Polish and Swedish public televisions: *Wiadomości* and *Rapport*, and answering the question of how these public service institutions, having the same goals in providing information, fulfil their tasks in crisis situations. The described events on one hand, happened in a distant part of the world, but on the other – hit an influential and elite nation, and due to threats of nuclear contamination, could have had an impact on other parts of the world.

In the article *Defining crisis events*, Eva-Karin Olsson described these events as “a special kind of news, with the potential to challenge everyday routines and practices [of news programmes]”³. Menahem Blondheim and Tamar Liebes claim however, that in order for an event to be treated by the media as extraordinary, it must contain “victims in substantial number or victims of celebrity status”⁴. Researchers name a number of reasons that can cause an event to be more intensely reported by the media: a break-down of non-failure technology, a natural disaster, a very serious accident, a public act of violence on a large-scale or war. Danish scholar Kirsten Mogensen noticed another aspect of the situation, which she termed “national crises”⁵, those that disrupt the social structure or are a threat to it. According to Swedish scholars Lars Nord and Jesper Strömbäck, the danger and risk of such an event makes media reports extensive and intensive⁶. The authors claim also that it is not likely for media to have standard procedures of informing about social threats, due to which those more serious issues would always receive more coverage than those less important. Estimating a threat is not always connected with its gravity, but with pure media calculation and primarily choosing stories with dramatic potential, aiding journalistic narration⁷.

A comparative analysis of covering on such media situations, the results of which have been presented in this article, was conducted with respect to three research aspects: research on media ethics, especially the question of reliability, objectivity and emotional involvement

² Ibidem.

³ E.-K. Olsson, *Defining crisis news events. How news organization managers drew upon history when handling the terror attacks September 11*, “Nordicom Review” Vol. 31 (2010), No. 31, p. 88.

⁴ M. Blondheim, T. Liebes, *Live Television’s Disaster Marathon of September 11 and its Subversive Potential*, “Prometheus” Vol. 20 (2002), No. 3, p. 273.

⁵ K. Mogensen, *Television journalism during terror attacks*, “Media, War & Conflict” Vol. 1 (2008), No. 1, p. 33.

⁶ L. Nord, J. Strömbäck, *Mission Impossible? Some Notes on Journalistic Shortcomings in the Coverage of War and Terrorism*, “Nordicom Review” Vol. 24 (2003), No. 2, p. 128.

⁷ Ibidem.

of the journalist⁸, presenting crisis events as a spectacle and infotainment⁹, and media communication in crisis situations¹⁰.

The research included the main editions of *Wiadomości* and *Rapport* from the crucial two weeks after the disaster in Japan – from March 11th 2011 when the earthquake and tsunami took place, to March 25th, when the media interest died down. Both are public television programmes: *Wiadomości* – Telewizja Polska S.A (Polish Television) and *Rapport* – Sveriges Television (Sweden's Television). Both are aired on the prime channels of their broadcasters, TVP1 and SVT1 daily at 19:30. According to Mediamätning Skandinavien¹¹ and TNS OBOP¹², both news programmes, and their channels have the highest viewership. In the weeks analysed, *Wiadomości* and *Rapport* were always in the first six of the most viewed programmes in public and commercial televisions¹³.

TVP and SVT see providing information as one of their priority tasks, which according to documents defining the mission of both companies, should be: timely, reliable, impartial, extensive and objective¹⁴. In the case of Polish and Swedish public television, there are of course many differences in management or the approach to programme issues, which is too extensive to describe in this article. The key difference, which influences the research subject, is the question of financing. SVT is almost entirely funded through a licence fee¹⁵ while in the budget of TVP for 2010, such fees added up to only 12,2 per cent¹⁶.

⁸ I.e. M. Kieran, *Objectivity, impartiality and good journalism*, [in:] *Media Ethics*, ed. M. Kieran, London 1998, p. 23–36; R. Coleman, H.D. Wu, *More than words alone: incorporating broadcasters' nonverbal communication into the stages of crisis coverage theory--evidence from September 11th*, "Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media" Vol. 50 (2006), No. 1, www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/147216156.html [accessed: 12.05.2011].

⁹ I.e. D. Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, London 2003; K.F. Gotham, *Critical theory and Katrina. Disaster, spectacle and immanent critique, Mission Impossible? Some Notes on Journalistic Shortcomings in the Coverage of War and Terrorism, Mission Impossible? Some Notes on Journalistic Shortcomings in the Coverage of War and Terrorism*, "City" Vol. 11 (2007), No. 1, pp. 81–99.

¹⁰ I.e. L. Nord, J. Strömbäck, *Mission...*

¹¹ Programmes of the two public television channels SVT1 and SVT2 and top three commercial television channels TV3, TV4 and Kanal 5, known in Sweden as the big five", www.mms.se [accessed: 21.02.2011].

¹² Data from TNS OBOP – correspondence with Dariusz Rocki, TAM Senior Account Executive, March 31st 2011.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Polish Television, Board Report on TVP income from licence fees for executing their public mission in 2010. Annex to Resolution No. 160/2011 of the TVP S.A. Board from March 8th 2011; Kulturdepartementet. Regeringsbeslut 86, Tillstånd att sända television 2010 [concession condition].

¹⁵ SVT, Årsredovisning 2010, Stockholm 2011, p. 2.

¹⁶ Polish Television, Resolution..., p. 7.

Coverage length

In the week of March 11–17^{th17} *Wiadomości* aired 84 minutes of reports and material connected with the Japanese disaster, each day it was the first topic of the programme, although in the last two days, information was scarcer. In the first days after the catastrophe it was 13–15 minutes, while after six days it decreased to 7–10 minutes. On the same week, the Swedish *Rapport* showed 92 minutes of coverage connected with the tragedy in Japan and it was always aired first. As in *Wiadomości*, there was a difference between information presented at the beginning (13–16 minutes) and at the end of the week (10–12 minutes). Taking into account that the Swedish programme is slightly shorter than the Polish one – counting the economic news and the weather it lasts 25 minutes, it aired relatively more information concerning the catastrophe in Japan.

The second week (March 18–25) was visibly different in both programmes. *Wiadomości* dedicated 11,5 minutes to the events in Japan. On March 22nd and 25th, no information on the tragedy was aired, and all the coverage of Japan was in the second part of the programme. *Rapport* gave the story much more time in that week, a full 34 minutes. Information on the situation in Japan was presented every day in the second part of the programme while on one day, March 24th, it was aired first.

Less interest in the disaster in the second week was the result of the development of another crisis situation (an uprising against Gaddafi in Libya, NATO air raids). Despite this, in the *Rapport*, attention was still directed towards Japan, while in *Wiadomości* there was more focus on covering domestic issues, especially on the Polish political scene.

Information content on the earthquake and tsunami

Both TVP and SVT sent their correspondents to Japan. In the case of SVT these were two people – a long-term correspondent, who reported already on March 11th, while TVP sent Piotr Kraśko, who began reporting on March 12th.

Table 1. Topics concerning the disaster in Japan discussed in the researched programmes between March 11–25th 2011

Topic	Number of reference/material	
	<i>Rapport</i>	<i>Wiadomości</i>
The event of the tsunami/disaster	1	5
Compatriots in Japan	2	3
Economy	3	6
Damage/casualties	10	4

¹⁷ The event took place on Friday, therefore one „week” is counted from Friday to Thursday.

Survivors	1	2
Rescue operation	8	5
Fukushima/nuclear energy	23	13
Fear in the world	2	7
Stories/difficult situation of people	11	6

Source: Own research.

As Table 1 shows, there was detailed interest of both programmes in the biggest threat after the tsunami wave, which was the breakdown in the power plant in Fukushima I. *Rapport* covered the issue extensively and most of the information referred to the situation in the Japanese plant, only five concerned the discussion on nuclear energy in Europe and Sweden. In case of *Wiadomości* six out of thirteen pieces about power plants concerned discussions in Europe and Poland. The different number of mentions, four in *Wiadomości* and ten in *Rapport* was on damage after the earthquake and casualties. In the Swedish programme, they informed more often about victims and funerals, footage from funeral homes was aired. The interest of Swedish journalists, greater than that of the Polish ones, in the human tragedy was mirrored by the number of information and footage about the situation of the Japanese people after the tragedy. *Rapport* showed almost twice as much material than *Wiadomości*. The Polish news, in turn, talked more often about the fear caused in other parts of the world by the failure of the power plant. In this context, there appeared topics, which were not present in *Rapport*, such as reports from Hawaii and Sakhalin, where apparently according to *Wiadomości*, panic broke out.

The first day of coverage

The first day of coverage, right after the earthquake and tsunami, was very different in both programmes. *Rapport* material, aiming at the greatest objectivity and a cautious way of expressing their opinion and comments, despite the overwhelming scale of the disaster, did not scare or use grand words. Descriptions that appeared in most reports were “concerned” and “troubled” (Swe. *oro, oroliga*). Both programmes showed the inside of buildings during the earthquake and the tsunami wave, but the Swedish reporter was economical with words, some footage was even shown without comment. Pictures from the disaster were shown for a relatively short time (a few minutes), and the material was mainly conversations with people about their feelings or expert opinions about the possible aftershock. Interviews were conducted with people residing in Japan and Japanese students in Sweden. The material also briefly mentioned problems of the damaged nuclear plant in Fukushima.

The message broadcast by *Wiadomości* was from day one much more dramatic and graphic. The anchor Małgorzata Wyszynska spoke with a louder voice, while large plasma displayed, meter-by-meter, the passing tsunami wave and very suggestive visualizations of buildings collapsing during an earthquake. Other film footage presenting both the earthquake and tsunami wave was much longer. It was repeated at the end of the report on Japan, without comment, but with background music suggesting a disaster movie.

On that day, coverage by *Wiadomości* concentrated on the earthquake, but also on the tsunami (how it is created, which countries has it afflicted etc.). The message was more dramatic than that of SVT, although in this particular programme it did not concern the verbal level, but the image (numerous visualizations on big-screen plasma, which *Rapport* did not even have), music (pompous music) and tone of voice of the anchor.

Reserved coverage made by *Rapport* should first and foremost be interpreted as the channel's characteristic striving towards objectivity, maintaining distance and little emotional engagement of anchors, which will be elaborated on later in the article. The tone of reporting in *Wiadomości* was more sensational and, it seems, the programme attempted to capture the attention of the viewer through an expanded visual side, creating from the report a media spectacle resembling a disaster movie. It is of course difficult to express in an article the way of speaking and the tone of a journalist, but often, listening to Piotr Kraško or Michał Adamczyk, one could get the impression that they are informing about something exciting and sensational, not the tragedy of a country and its people. Gotham could here be quoted, analysing media relations after hurricane Katrina, who claimed that natural disasters and their effects, are treated by media as a kind of spectacle and therefore, media footage has elements characteristic for entertainment: "ephemerality, fragmentation, immediacy and intense drama"¹⁸.

Language used in coverage

Coverage in the next few days was also different between and in each programme, not just in content, but also in the language used. In every feature concerning Japan, anchors and reporters of *Wiadomości* used dramatic words and terms, such as: *gigantic, deadly threat, terrifying, dramatic, nightmare, shocking, atomic disaster, nuclear threat, fatal, cataclysm, nuclear catastrophe, shock, fear, chaos, drama, threat*. Krzysztof Ziemięc on March 14th in his first sentence used the words: "nuclear disaster", "shock", "fear", and "nightmare". That

¹⁸ K.F. Gotham, *Critical theory...*, p. 83.

day, one of the information scrolls in the footage read: “Japan immersed in chaos. Fear of contamination, threat of nuclear disaster”.

In the statements of journalists in *Rapport*, dramatic expressions were rarer: in the whole first week in coverage of the power plant in Fukushima the words “nightmare” and “dramatic” were only used once. All the participants of the reports expressed themselves in a much more balanced way and Swedish experts called the situation in Fukushima “a very serious accident”. The anchors also referred to the case as a “nuclear accident” or “emergency”. The journalist presenting the news on March 13th repeated the words of the Japanese Prime Minister, calling the earthquake and tsunami “the worst crisis in Japan since World War II”. It is interesting that these words, on that same day, were repeated by Piotr Kraško, but he reinforced them, saying that “Japan hasn’t been through such a drama since Hiroshima” [author’s marks]¹⁹. Kraško used the comparison with Hiroshima again the next day. Interestingly, the words of the Japanese Prime Minister about the worst crisis since the war referred to all the elements of the disaster: the earthquake, tsunami and plant breakdown, while Piotr Kraško repeated them only in the context of the situation in Fukushima.

The events in the nuclear power plant in Fukushima were described by the Swedish programme as a “difficult position” or an “emergency situation” (Swe. *nödläge*). Terms like “atomic threat” or “nuclear disaster” were not used. In one case, a journalist described the situation in a more alarming tone, saying: “This is probably the worst nightmare for any country, any government – a nuclear power plant explosion in a densely populated area”. It should be noted however, that in this case, the reporter did not call the situation “a threat” or “an atomic disaster”, but stated the fact of an explosion in the plant. The word “disaster” was mentioned, but in a different context: in footage about the exercises in the Swedish plants undertaken in case of “a contingent disaster”. The *Rapport* journalist promptly added that the risk of its occurrence was a million to one. Again, in the context of the situation in Fukushima, the milder word “concern” was used more than once.

The difference in the choice of words is all the more interesting that reporting on the progress of events in the Fukushima nuclear power plant, both programmes showed similar footage. It was detailed information on what was going on in the plant, backed-up by expert explanations on radiation, cooling and melting of the atomic core. Both showed animation and computer visualizations of what had happened in the plant. Yet the verbal layer, and in the

¹⁹ The exact words of the Japanese Prime Minister were the following: “Japan is facing its biggest crisis since the second world war”, after: www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/13/japan-crisis-worst-since-second-world-war [accessed: 12.07.2011].

case of *Wiadomości*, also the distinct way of reporting by Piotr Kraško, made the programme seem alarming and sensational, while *Rapport* informed about the seriousness of the situation, but was reassuring at the same time.

Film footage and non-verbal messages

The dramaturgy of the analysed coverage was not created through the choice of film footage²⁰, but by the means of expression of correspondents. Mogensen, who researched reporters broadcasting live after the September 11 attacks, claimed that footage was often censored, long-distance and poorly lighted pictures were shown, so as not to arouse fear, but most of all, to restrain from dramatizing²¹. In the case of reporting from Fukushima, the access to film footage was limited. Foreign televisions decided not to send their reporters to that region and all pictures, both those shown in Poland and in Sweden, were the property of Japanese television, but they too were often outdated (the same shot over and over) or simply a bird's eye view. Sensation and dramaturgy of the events were thus created by reporters, by means of verbal and non-verbal elements.

As McCombs, Shaw and Weaver claim²², that journalistic narration can be “the chronicle”, which is reporting noteworthy facts or “the story”, engaging the reader (viewer) through the style of storytelling. In both programmes, the narration was “engaging”, which was attained, among others, by using a certain tone and voice modulation²³.

Informing on threats and risk

In her extensive research on crisis communication and media action procedures in potentially risky situations, Gunilla Jarlbro²⁴ claims that a form of communication is needed that will lead

²⁰ Although, as Swedish and Norwegian researchers Stig Arne Nohrstedt, Birgitta Höijer i Rune Ottosen (2002) claim, film footage in this type of coverage is normally used to reinforce dramaturgy. They conducted an analysis of media coverage on the war in Kosovo in relation to inducing compassion in viewers, concentrating on film footage. Scholars write that viewers remembered pictures: „crowds of refugees, people crying in camps, pictures of children and elderly people” (S.A. Nohrstedt, B. Höijer, R. Ottosen, *Kosovokonflikten, medierna och medlidandet – Ett projekt om medierapporteringen, propagandan och allmänhetens reflektioner*, RAPPORT 190, Styrelsen för psykologiskt försvar, Stockholm 2002, p. 109).

²¹ K. Mogensen, *Television...*, p. 29.

²² M.E. McCombs, D.L. Shaw, D.H. Weaver, *Communication and democracy. Exploring the intellectual frontiers in agenda-setting theory*, New Jersey 1997, p. 12.

²³ The importance of using these types of means of expression was visible in the research on the relation between non-verbal communication and viewer feelings in crisis situations by Coleman and Wu. In the analysis on the coverage of the September 11 attacks, where focus is put on gestures and facial expressions, researches underline that women have a tendency to show emotions by non-verbal communication – compare idem. *More than words...*

²⁴ G. Jarlbro, *Krisjournalistik eller journalistik i kris? En forskningsöversikt om medier, risker och kriser*, Stockholm 2004, p. 19.

to a proper assessment of risk by society and the individual. In the context of rationally informing on threats and risks, excessive negative speculation is what characterizes reporters of *Wiadomości*. Watching *Rapport*, one is under the impression that coverage from the power plant in Fukushima was severed as a progress of events and step-by-step displayed attempts to manage the emergency. One of the Swedish experts asked by *Rapport* on March 12th to assess the situation said he did not have enough information, but did not speculate nor claim that information in Japan was somehow censored. The Swedish programme precisely explained the methods of dealing with the emergency, both by means of short visualizations, and expert statements. The footage on Fukushima shown on March 18th, begins with the anchor claiming it remains unknown whether control of the plant has been regained or not. On March 24th in the feature on pumping water out of the plant, the reporter talked about the possibility of a partial melting of the atomic core – there was however no suggestion that someone was trying to hide this information, but rather that, due to difficult conditions in the plant, it was simply hard to establish.

Meanwhile in *Wiadomości* from March 12th, Piotr Kraśko talking about the power plant suggested that it remained unknown whether someone had intentionally lied to the public and if a sufficient number of people had been evacuated. Towards the end, after the statement of the reporter and the footage, two reassuring expert declarations were presented, a Polish and a Japanese one, which seemed contradictory to the reporter's earlier claims. Dramatic speculation began on March 13th: “Millions of people could be exposed to radiation” said Michał Adamczyk. After this statement, a connection with Piotr Kraśko in Tokyo was established – he was afraid of the possibility of rain and “that it might be much worse, because an explosion can happen at any moment”. He used dramatic words again on March 15th, saying that “Japan is constantly on the verge of another tragedy”. According to *Wiadomości*, information on the level of radiation was contradictory, but most often, these were just “rumours”. Piotr Kraśko stated on March 16th that “there is only one conclusion: it must be worse than anyone would have wanted to admit”.

Interesting in this context is the fact that in the second week of the disaster, when there was much less information about Japan in both programmes, the only longer report in *Wiadomości* was a feature on the cloud of radiation from Japan, approaching Poland. This coverage too was at times contradictory. The information title on the scroll was “Cloud approaching. Radioactive swarms over Europe”, and the animation displayed by the anchor showed a fast-moving and dangerous cloud over the map of the world. There was a report of purchasing Lugol's solution and iodine in pharmacies, while the material was illustrated by a

roaring siren in the area of the Fukushima power plant. In the same material, a short expert statement was shown, claiming that the cloud, even if it reached Poland, would contain marginal amounts of radioactive substances. The information however, relatively short compared to other footage, could have easily been omitted by the viewer. A similar, short feature was aired in Sweden on March 16th: people on the street were polled whether they were afraid of radiation, followed by a reassuring expert statement.

The *Rapport* programme used a direct comparison to Chernobyl – on March 20th a report was shown on the situation of Swedish reindeer breeders, who suffered severely 25 years ago and till this day, need to check meat for the presence of radioactive elements. The footage was low-pitched in statements, it was underlined that today we know there were no instances of cancer due to Chernobyl.

Contemplating the role of the media in communicating information on risks, Mary McCarthy, Mary Brennan, Martine De Boer and Christopher Ritson claim that in the case of crisis communication in extreme situations the role of the media is to educate the public, but according to their research, communication scholars often have a very bad opinion of journalists and their ability to communicate information connected with science and technology in crisis situations²⁵. Researchers claim that informing about risk is determined by so-called news values and “journalists may bring more uncertainty and controversy into a story than is the case, in order to make the risk story more newsworthy”²⁶, which is believed to be an accurate conclusion in the case of journalists reporting from Fukushima for *Wiadomości*.

Journalists and emotions

Both Polish and Swedish journalists were very emotionally involved in reporting from Japan, but emphasised different issues. Piotr Kraško spoke in a distinct way, stressing certain words. His statements were pompous – the reporter compared the extent of the disaster for the Japanese people to the death of Pope John Paul II for Poles. The tone of SVT reporters was serious and sad, at times grieving, but without pathos. They pointed to the human aspect of

²⁵ *Media risk communication – what was said by whom and how was it interpreted*, auth. M. McCarthy and oth., “Journal of Risk Research” Vol. 11 (2008), No. 3, p. 375.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 376.

the disaster, the thousands of casualties it took. In some material the narration is broken, as if reporters wanted to leave viewers one-on-one and without a comment on the drastic images²⁷.

The issue of casualties was resolved in the Swedish programme by putting emphasis on the number of personifications used in reports. According to news values presented by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge it is a procedure in which events are shown from the perspective of the individual, and the phenomena based on the example of an actual person or people²⁸. Analysing Swedish coverage of the Estonia ferry accident, Jarlbro claims that personification often aided not only tabloids, but also newscasts, in attracting viewers and readers by means of sensation²⁹. Personification is also widely used in situations, when an event is too complicated on other levels, therefore the media concentrate on the story of one person or family³⁰.

Both programmes used the method to present events connected with the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. For example, the problem of finding Swedes staying in Japan was shown referring to a specific Swedish family, the Alfredssons, who were waiting to hear from their daughter. *Rapport* used personification seventeen times during the analysed weeks, while *Wiadomości* used it eleven times. The Polish programme often aired short features on the Japanese people, illustrating events, while *Rapport* used mini-reportages, describing in detail the lives of specific people.

An example is a few-minute reportage from March 12th on Mr. Sasaki, who lives in Tokyo. The elderly man keeps a packed backpack and a water supply in his hall in case of an earthquake. Mr. Sasaki and his neighbour were raised in a province seriously damaged by tsunami waves, and their families are still there. The report describes their experience, attempts to contact their families and relief they felt when it turned out everyone had survived, although they no longer had a place to live. Another short feature from March 18th is a report from the airport on which SVT journalists meet people leaving Japan. More time was devoted to two cases. The first was a teacher, escorting his mother, but himself deciding to stay in Japan because he believed he owed it to his country and his pupils. The second case was a family flying to Seoul, where not all of the family members were confident about the decision to leave the country.

²⁷ Swedish journalists, consciously or not, used the method described by Martin Bell, according to which understatement and “economy in commenting” work best in television, especially in contrast with powerful and compassionate visuals. M. Bell, *The journalism of attachment*, [in:] *Media Ethics*, p. 18.

²⁸ J. Galtung, M.H. Ruge, *The structure of foreign news: the presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers*, “Journal of International Peace Research” Vol. 2 (1965), No. 1, p. 68.

²⁹ G. Jarlbro, *Krisjournalistik...*, p. 30.

³⁰ M.E. McCombs, D.L. Shaw, D.H. Weaver, *Communication...*, pp. 12–13.

News coverage was presented by the *Rapport* journalist Nilofar Saidi, whose tone of voice was rather emotional, but in a different way than that of the previously described Piotr Kraśko. Refraining from pathos, the reporter expressed sadness, emotion, concern and consideration, by momentarily going silent.

In editions of *Rapport* in which there are no reports on crisis events, the anchors and reporters are detached. They simply read the news, sometimes conduct short interviews. They do not comment or state their opinions, they very rarely joke and even their tone of voice is neutral. This was different in reports from Japan. The emotional engagement of the journalists was clearly visible and anchor people talking with correspondents expressed concern about their health and life. Meanwhile, reporters from TVP, no matter the topic, are always more emotional and persuasive, not restraining from journalistic opinions and comments presented alongside facts.

Covering the news in Japan, journalists of *Rapport* clearly became emotionally involved³¹. The tone of *Wiadomości*, as previously mentioned, was much more sensational and underlined the drama of events, while the *Rapport* crew inspired “global compassion” – described by Höjjer³² – by voicing human suffering³³. It was expressed, for example, by the previously described use of the tone of voice, but also by the sad tone of rhetorical questions: “What can a person do, too old to manage to stand up, before a wave comes?” (March 17th). “How long will the empathy last, when warehouses with medication will run dry and food will finish, when one’s loved ones are gone?” (March 16th).

Information scrolls

An important difference in the reports of the two channels was the information scrolls showed on screen during each piece of news. A previous extensive research of the author³⁴ assumed that information presented in the *Rapport* is short and neutral, while journalists from *Wiadomości* use all types of wordplay, even in the situation of a natural disaster, where such games are rather inappropriate. These are, for instance, contents such as: “Fukushima

³¹ Compare: M. Bell, *Journalism...*

³² B. Höjjer, *The Discourse of Global Compassion and the Media*, “Nordicom Review” Vol. 24 (2003), No. 2, p. 109.

³³ As in the case of agenda setting, whose supporters point to the connection between media exposition of a humanitarian crisis and the donations for that cause, viewers towards which the method of eliciting global compassion is used should respond to this type of message (mainly televised) as good citizens: with care and following this financial commitment (M.E. McCombs, *Ustanawianie agendy. Media masowe i opinia publiczna* [Setting the agenda. The mass media and public opinion], Kraków 2009).

³⁴ The research concerned new values in *Rapport* and *Wiadomości*. M. Chacińska, *Dobór i prezentacja wiadomości w serwisach informacyjnych – porównanie kryteriów wyboru i sposobu przedstawienia w szwedzkiej i polskiej telewizji publicznej*, “Panoptikum” Nr 10 (17) 2011.

Samurais” (about the workers trying to fix the failure in the power plant), “Shockingly calm” (on the good preparation for natural disasters by the Japanese), “Core of the drama” (on the failure of nuclear plant), “Market earthquake”, “Japan’s economy drowns and burns” (on the stock market falls caused by the situation in Japan). The language of word-play, language jokes, bon-mots and sayings are, according to the previously mentioned research, characteristic for *Wiadomości* and perhaps have the purpose of making the news more attractive for the younger viewer, but it is also an expression of culture of the Polish language, which in comparison with Scandinavian, is more ornate. *Rapport* information scrolls contain just the facts: “Japan. Tsunami after earthquake”. “Emergency situation in nuclear power plant”.

Economic news

The last issue, which differentiated the Swedish and Polish programme, was economic news connected with the earthquake. The estimation of the economic situation in Japan after the disaster and its influence on world markets was again more dramatic and negative in the Polish programme. *Rapport* on March 11th pointed to the fact that Japan faces great losses, still experts underlined, that it is the third economy in the world, additionally, not in-debt. Information on stock market losses was shown as facts, with no comment. The influence of the situation on the Swedish economy was discussed: problems with supplying parts for Volvo factories. For example, on March 17th *Rapport* informed, that Volvo had to suspend production and that some Swedish companies, like H&M and IKEA, closed their shops in Tokyo due to damage. Mentioned were the events in which H&M gave away clothes to those who had lost their homes in the disaster and Volvo donated cars for rescue operations.

Wiadomości had more alarming economic information referring to the situation in Japan than *Rapport*. In this case, the contrast is striking. While experts from *Rapport* said that the costs of the cataclysm will be high, but Japan will survive, *Wiadomości* concluded that the country is “on the brink of disaster” and “its economy is in chaos”, which makes “the world faces a serious crisis”. Although towards the end of the extensive and alarming material was the opinion of an expert, judging that the Japanese will manage, it was all too marginal in relation to the earlier material. The finishing stand-up of the reporter was as follows: “Japan has not yet shaken the world, although it is hard to say if we might encounter an aftershock”. According to *Wiadomości*, March 15th was the day of “an earthquake on the markets” and stock market falls, also an expert opinion was aired, stating that Poles, who have loans in francs, will be paying for the damage.

Differences in the way of interpreting the influence of the natural disasters on economic issues can of course resemble the discrepancies between Polish and Swedish economies, and their reaction towards similar cataclysms. It would justify the different judgment made by both televisions; it seems however that the tone and overtly dramatic vocabulary in the newsroom of *Wiadomości* exaggerated the situation.

Conclusion

As the analysis showed, the main Polish and Swedish public television news programmes greatly differ in the way they present information on crisis events, an example of which were the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Both stations had similar material and took up similar topics in nearly the same degree, but the tone of their statements, way of presenting them and the choice of words so differentiated *Rapport* and *Wiadomości*, it made them look like they were broadcasting completely different information. *Wiadomości* operated on dramatic vocabulary and intonation, which along with a highly reactive image gave the events a more sensational and alarming tone. Reporters and journalists from *Rapport*, broadcasting similar, often even the same film footage, chose their words very carefully, sometimes being silent, and their tone evoked compassion rather than fear.

There is no research out rightly stating that society reacts in panic towards alarming media news, even if they are dramatic or sensational³⁵. It was however established that there is a connection between the way news is reported by the media in a situation of threat towards social consciousness and risk perception³⁶. In the times of fast access to many sources of information, reactions similar to those in the 1930s should no longer be expected. In the case of *Wiadomości*, the problem is that their newscast takes on the form of a spectacle or disaster marathon³⁷. Coverage done by *Wiadomości* uses many elements of infotainment: flashy and fast-changing visualizations on a plasma screen, dramatic music, pompous narration of anchors and reporters, and also, underlining the element of the unknown. The message on the situation in Fukushima looked like a disaster series, in which statements such as the possibility of “explosions”, “radioactive contamination of millions of people” or the “race against time”, underlining the uncertainty of the situation, were aimed not necessarily at really informing about the threat, but at gaining more television viewers.

³⁵ G. Jarlbro, *Krisjournalistik...*, p. 63.

³⁶ *Media risk...*, p. 376.

³⁷ Scholars describe *disaster marathons* as a media event characterized by three types of effects: 1) special effects, which are, i.e. constant repetition of one symbol of the catastrophe (plane hitting the WTC), 2) temporal effect, which is the domination of the given element in the media and 3) narrative effects, which is the progress of the situation, enabling continuing the coverage for a longer time (M. Blondheim, *Live...*, pp. 272–273).

Of course, the tragedy of the Japanese and the possibility of a life-threatening cataclysm should not be played down. What brings about doubt is the balance between the probability of such a threat for Europe and Poland and the way of informing about it or creating a spectacle out of a tragic event. Journalists and editors of *Wiadomości* searched for controversies or those responsible for the tragedy, while *Rapport* was more concentrated on how it could be rid of. *Wiadomości* tried to show the conflict between experts on the further development of the situation or a conflict on the line government-citizens (many comments of those who didn't believe what the authorities said)³⁸. In *Rapport*, there was less focus on these types of issues, concentrating on the course of the rescue action. The Swedish programme rarely speculated on the topic of a potential fault or reliability of information delivered by the Japanese government. They used many personalizations, which, as mentioned, could have also had the function of increasing viewer interest.

Journalists from *Rapport* also showed emotions and did not detach themselves, but as the research showed, they concentrated on emotions connected with grief and loss, thus inspiring compassion in Swedish viewers, which was underlined by numerous personalizations. Of course, it was also a form of manipulation and spectacle, with the difference that one can hope it brings benefits to the victims of the disaster, and not just advertising income for the broadcasting company.

³⁸ Compare: *Media risk...*, p. 376.