

**Research on the additional journalistic education needs
BETWEEN DESIRES AND REALITY**

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Since their establishment, Media Plan Institute and its High School of Journalism in Sarajevo are attempting to contribute to the advancement and modernisation of journalistic profession, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in all countries of the region. The readers of this web-magazine are well aware that journalism is a highly dynamic profession, with social and political conditions that make the environment (and provide themes) of its work changing constantly and rapidly. On the other hand, the high-speed development of information technologies erases divisions among media workers. Contemporary journalism is in the content, indeed; but it is also in its technical presentation. Media Plan Institute is trying to stay on top of the development of journalistic profession, at the same time adjusting its contents to the needs of the journalists of the area.

However, the successes and awards won by the School of Journalism and its parental organisation could easily 'lull' and 'spoil' its educational personnel and the organisers of educational programme. For that reason, in December 2004, Media Plan Institute launched an extensive research in the areas of BiH, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, aimed at producing a sort of a cross-section of its to-date work and adjusting its plans and objectives to current situation in regional journalism. Namely, not so long ago, most of the countries of the region were, directly or indirectly involved in war activities. Initially, they felt the need for war reporting and the requirement to maintain the quality journalism in the improvised conditions, which was a hard task in the ethnically-oversized constellation of affairs. After the war, all branches of journalism suffered the lack of educated journalistic personnel, media were poor, young people unable to financially bear a long-time education, while the quality of the studies remained questionable, and there was a certain conflict between experienced journalists who obtained their experiences through the hardships of war, and the young graduates of journalism. Considering the above political, economic and social changes, the Media Plan Institute High School of Journalism, like many other journalistic organisations and associations as well, attempted to lessen their negative consequences and help journalistic profession achieve the levels of international journalism of modern time.

However, the question is how effective these programmes still are. Political and social atmosphere in the region has been undergoing significant changes in recent years, affecting journalistic profession profoundly. For this reason, organisations for additional education of journalists are faced with the need to reconsider their efficacy and look at the necessity to change. As one of the pioneers in the education of journalists in post-war period, Media Plan Institute has taken initiative again, and conducted a comprehensive regional research of journalistic profession. The former and current students of the High School of Journalism, from all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro interviewed their colleagues and compatriots. They asked the young students of journalism and other social sciences about their satisfaction levels with their studies, what were the things they lacked, whether they wanted to continue their professional improvement through organised education, and what conditions they found necessary for that. Journalists with degree, who have not found their place in the profession were asked about the happenings in journalistic circles, and if they had lost their interest in journalism and further education, as well as about the ways experienced journalists could help them. Another group of respondents included the professors of journalism, who were asked if they were content with their departments, and what they thought about the young generations of journalists and their performance in professional work. And finally, the group of media managers was asked about the needs of media and the needs of young journalists. The replies were diverse and varied; unfortunately, though, sometimes they were too similar and repetitive. According to general impression, the journalistic profession of the region is of an under-average quality, and has a strong need for support and reformation.

Phased stages in journalists' education

The foremost inference of all phases of the research is the assumption that, in this area, successful journalists are formed through three main steps:

1. University education accomplished, preferably in journalism.
2. Upon the completion of the studies, attending a practical school of journalism, which provides the opportunity to practically apply and confirm the knowledge obtained in the university, as well as specialising in particular medium and journalistic area.
3. Work in a medium, along with occasional courses in the form of seminars, trainings and other shorter educative programmes, aimed at providing continuous education to journalists of all levels of experience on media trends, new methods, techniques and technologies.

Students, journalists, professors of journalism and media managers were unanimous in their assessment that the study of journalism provides a good theoretical base and necessary starting point for the entry into journalistic profession, but it fails to equip students with skills necessary for professional work in media newsrooms. Given the fact that educational reforms are a slow-paced bureaucratic process, no major changes in the system of university education nor their first effects can be expected to happen in near future. Therefore, it is a commonly-accepted practice to count on the practical schools of journalism, which provide the possibility of obtaining practical skills, increase the confidence of young journalists about their own knowledge and, generally, make journalists ready for media and their specific requirements.

The main disadvantage of the above schools of journalism is their price, which remains unaffordable for most of the unemployed journalists. The maximum participation by journalists goes up to 10% of the scholarship (up to 500 euros) – the investment affordable for 14% of journalists and the same percentage of students, or, possibly, up to 2,000 Euro per year (22% of students and 8% of interviewed journalists), provided the costs of accommodation and food for participants are paid. Interestingly, the students and journalists of Tuzla have shown the highest readiness to bear the costs of education themselves, or at least to significantly participate therein. Full fellowship granted, i.e. free entry was the only condition for 39% students of social sciences and 50% of journalists to attend journalistic schools at all. The reduction, or full withdrawal of international donations that covered all, or major part of the costs of these schools by now, could result in their closure. Therefore, new sources and systems of funding should be sought for. Alongside the donations, which are still necessary, those among the journalists that are particularly interested, talented and promising should be offered fellowships for such schools, provided they have reached the levels and standards of their counterparts abroad.

The length of education period in the schools of journalism should range from six months, as Belgrade and Priština media suggest, up to one year, which is the option advocated by Zagreb journalists. A significant difference has been spotted between Serbia and Kosovo on one side, and Croatia and, to a degree, BiH on the other, which can be explained with a higher life standard in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a stronger competition among educated journalists. Life standard remains quite low in Priština and Belgrade, therefore the strong pressure and the requirement for students to find jobs and start earning money as soon as possible, because the study itself takes too long time. According to general impression, a school of journalism should last between six months and one year of continuous and intensive studies, and not alongside regular work. The adjustment of needs and the preference of journalists across the region would mean an 8-month school of journalism. The syllabuses of the schools of journalism would be probably best aligned with the needs of the entire region if the programme is divided in

two parts: the first two thirds (around 8 months) of classical education in the school of journalism, and the remaining 4 months of online tuition (distance learning). Thus, the journalists would be able to return to their places of living and continue their regular jobs, receiving intensive practical journalistic tasks – a sort of an exercise and practical application of knowledge, with the possibility of continuous consultations and contacts with the mentor. This is only one of the options, and its advantages and disadvantages should be assessed by each school of journalism individually.

The programme of a quality school of journalism should include:

- Investigative journalism (especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina);
- RTV production (especially in major Zagreb media);
- Training in technologies (all types of media, but more frequently in BiH and Montenegro);
- Web journalism (mainly in Zagreb, Podgorica and Priština).

All areas of journalism taught at school should be presented through practical examples, exercises and workshops. Reality-based education, grounded on actual events and topics engaging media environment, remains the best way to adopt the knowledge on thematic journalism, in particular concerning the areas of politics, international relations, culture, ethics, human rights and democracy, which are the priority needs of both media and journalists themselves.

When it comes to a long-term education, if they do not target one particular area of specialisation or one particular medium, it is recommendable to divide the education into segments. So, for example, during the first two parts (semesters), all participants would attend the tuition together, while in the last one, they would be split up by their respective media. This method of work would provide the specialisation of journalists by media types, which cannot be achieved in the faculties of journalism. It is a pleasing fact that the High School of Journalism has employed this practice for years.

The practical schools of journalism should represent a link between the university and the media. Tight cooperation with the professors of journalism would provide schools with conditions for a more satisfactory selection of participants, because professors are competent to recommend students for specific educational programmes. On the other hand, the teachers of schools can identify the predispositions and talents of their attendees for a particular medium or area of journalism, and make appropriate recommendations to relevant media upon the completion of the school. So, a better cooperation among faculties, schools and media would be beneficial and

pleasing for everyone, and it would certainly raise the quality of professional journalism in the region to a higher level.

Those journalists that are employed should be offered shorter (up to 3 months) and more affordable educative programmes (up to 500 EURO), with a more specific focus. Media in the region are mainly poor, with no possibility to finance their employees or to afford their longer absence from work. For that reason, training courses organised for employed journalists should focus specific thematic units. In addition, educational institutions with quality and proficient teaching personnel could organise seminars, workshops, even study groups aimed at presenting all developmental changes in journalism, changes in media technologies and similar.

Requirement to officially verify diplomas in the educational system of the country

The research also discovered how important it was that the schools of journalism, which receive students who graduated in other faculties, and which meet the standards of similar schools abroad (i.e., not courses and internships), grant verified diplomas of expert journalist, MA in journalism and similar, to the students that successfully complete their programmes. Otherwise, such a high level of expertise would not be easily recognised in the market, which could adversely affect the motivation of students to attend such schools at all. The research reveals that official verification remains a matter of high importance for as many as 58.5% of journalists and 44.4% of students, and that it generally represents one of the key criteria for students to choose a particular school of journalism.

Another important criterion, as well as the general inference of the research, includes the issue of payment for additional education. Quality education should be continuous, providing students with the possibility to parallelly work and learn. Even media themselves are not overly prepared to bear the costs or to participate in the funding of education for employed journalists, as researches have shown. Namely, 26.1% of media are ready to allocate up to 500 Euro per year for the education of journalists; 8.7 % are ready to offer between 500 and 1,000 Euro; 13% - 1,000 to 1,500 Euro; 4% - up to 2,000 Euro, while as many as 20.1% would pay absolutely nothing. So, media are not ready to significantly invest into the education of journalists, while the earnings of students and employed journalists remain insufficient; therefore, all to-date education courses were mainly financed by foreign donors. It is questionable how much of the education for journalists would be organised in the region without these donations, regardless of the strong need of media and high motivation of students.

In addition to the official verification of the schools of journalism, their prices and educative programmes, another important criterion of selection is the respectability of the school in journalistic circles, and its teaching personnel. Various countries of the region favour certain institutions; however, the research has identified only few among them, which are highly valued by the professors of journalism and media managers. We shall remind only of the most important among them, and their main advantages:

1. Media Plan Institute and the High School of Journalism – According to the opinions of media managers, the positive sides of this institution include: accent on the practical application of knowledge, high-quality instructional personnel, permanent and continued education, good curriculum adapted to the needs of media and journalists. The praises for this School are coming from the managers of all BiH towns, from Zagreb and Belgrade, as well as all media types, in particular from television stations. This institution is assessed as highly valuable by the professors of BiH, Croatian and Serbian universities alike. One of the professors of journalism from Zagreb has also stated his appreciation of Media Plan Institute's partner organisation, the High School of Journalism in Lille, for its excellent training for journalists.
2. BBC School – The high level of professionalism and practical training on simple examples from real life remain the advantages of this School, as emphasised by print media managers in Podgorica, Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka. BiH professors have many praises for BBC School of Journalism, because it provides its participants with practical and technological education through concrete examples.
3. IREXProMedia – through practice and study visits, it offers journalistic specialisation in various areas, as the managers of BiH and Kosovo emphasise. The IREX courses are recommended by professors in Kosovo and Serbia, because they enable good cooperation among interested NGOs, professional associations (NUNS) and journalists.
4. Media Centar, Sarajevo – through the engagement of foreign experts, it runs high-quality trainings, mainly for the journalists of Sarajevo media.
5. OSCE programmes of training for journalists in Kosovo – a very commendable free education for local journalists.
6. The Association of Independent Electronic Media and its educational programmes in Serbia (ANEM) – organises short and focused courses for radio journalists, which are “thematically

and methodologically adapted to this category”, as Belgrade University professors said. However, the impact of this institution does not seem to be strong outside its parental country. In addition to this one, another positively assessed institution is the Novi Sad School of Journalism, as it insists on practical work and enables journalists to give shape to actual topics.

Finally, we shall add that this comprehensive research project achieved its objectives: it shed light on the targeted aspects of journalism. This means that reliable data was collected on the extent of needs for additional education of journalists, as well as the types, forms and all relevant characteristics of the required education, and common journalistic considerations in BiH, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro. However, the research also discovered certain secondary effects and signs, which represent the guide-lines and indicators of the need for fresh, more specific researches of journalistic profession in the region, or some of its parts.

Media Plan Institute will attempt to continue its organisational orientation aimed at the modernisation and development of journalism in the region, through the adjustment of educational programmes for journalists to the results of this research. The weaknesses of journalistic profession can be overcome, as long as there is a strong need for professional development among journalists themselves, while the task of all media organisations and journalistic associations is to help them achieve that goal.

Available only on Bosnian language on <http://emagazin.mediaplan.ba/analize/?ID=6>

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