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Recommendations for modern journalism education

CONCLUSIONS BY PARTICIPANTS OF A CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ON JOURNALISM EDUCATION BY KAS MEDIA PROGRAM SOUTH EAST EUROPE, 28 MARCH 2017, SOFIA

The large numbers of enrolled students and insufficient technical equipment at the faculties of journalism in South East Europe have a crucial impact on the work of university professors. Leading media scholars from all over Europe discussed current challenges in education and compiled a set of recommendations in two workshops in Sofia on 28 March 2017. They shaped guidelines for universities and governments and commented on cooperation between universities and media outlets. In a third workshop, students from South East Europe shared their points of view how journalism programmes can be reformed.

Universities

Curricula adjustments: Changes of the learning plans are necessary in order to provide students with contemporary knowledge that they will need in the newsrooms. Students often identify themselves as TV, radio or online journalists. This approach is outdated. Nowadays everything is cross-media and journalists need to produce online, video and text at the same time. Hence the universities have to offer courses for all types of media and teach their integration. The curricula should be modern, but at the same time not "trendy".

Independence of journalism faculties: The journalism departments at universities must be separated from other faculties. The theory that is taught should be primarily concentrated in one journalism department. Additional courses of other faculties could

be chosen by the students as an additional specialisation.

Guest lecturers: The faculties should keep on inviting journalists, editors-in-chief and media managers to give lectures at the universities. In doing that the students can gain better insights into the journalism practice and the cooperation between media outlets and the universities could be strengthened.

Lifelong learning: Universities should provide courses to alumni and seniors on new developments in journalism such as fake news. Additionally, they could offer courses in the field of media literacy that can help citizens to make a difference between propaganda and true information.

Exchange of lecturers: Some of the current exchange programmes for university professors like "Erasmus +" should be further improved. The period for the stay at guest universities is often too short. Besides that, the programme does not cover all costs, and due to the low salaries of universities professors in South East Europe it is not possible for most of them to take part in such kind of exchange.

Alumni networks: In order to provide data on the career paths of graduates, strong alumni networks should be built. They could serve also as an indication for the satisfaction of graduates with the journalism programmes and give input for further improvements. Some universities rely on alumni networks in terms of philanthropy.

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So they should also be used as a source for the modernisation of learning conditions and technical equipment at the journalism departments.

Governments

Investments in education: The governments have to make more investments in journalism education due to its impact on the democratisation processes in South East Europe. At the same time, the state should not interfere in the curricula at the universities.

National coordination: The governments could support the national coordination between journalism faculties, universities and the media market. There is a better policy needed for the enrolment of journalism students. Their number should be reduced without changes in the state funding of journalism faculties. It is necessary to find more efficient criteria in order to meet the financial needs of the universities.

Cooperation on European level: Better cooperation between state institutions and NGOs in Europe could contribute to set international standards for the journalism education. Countries with best-practice-examples for the training of young journalists in terms of policy could share their experience with other states in order to foster not only the journalism education, but also the democracy in the continent.

Media outlets

Standardisation of cooperation with universities: Written contracts pave the way for a standardisation of the cooperation between media outlets and universities, enabling students to gain practical experience. Internships shall be part of the curriculum and last at least three months up to one year. Everything less than this period of time wouldn't be beneficial for either side. The students' performance should be evaluated by their published work.

Teaching practical courses at universities: Experienced journalists from media outlets could improve the practical training of students by teaching courses at universities

on specific topics (e.g. crime, environment, entrepreneurial journalism). These courses shall be more than a guest lecture and could be counted as an elective subject. During such kind of seminars students have to produce at least one journalistic piece which should be evaluated by the practitioner.

Joint production: One part of a good cooperation between media outlets and universities could be the establishment of joint productions in which students can work together with media on a special journalism project.

Vocational training after graduation: Students shall get the possibility of doing vocational trainings after they graduate. This could be part of an agreement between universities and media outlets. The vocational training could last up to one year. This post-graduate programme at the media outlet could be open not only to graduates from journalism and communication programmes, but to other disciplines as well.

Continuous training for journalists: Media outlets should give their journalists the opportunity to receive further training even after working already for some years. For these trainings journalists could attend university courses on mobile journalism, media ethics, etc. In doing so media outlets can raise the professional qualification of the journalists and ensure that they are informed about new trends in journalism.

Journalism students' recommendations

Shaping curricula efficiently: The high amount of modules during the journalism studies is a disadvantage in the students' point of view. Examples from Bulgaria (up to 60 courses during Bachelor) and Albania (approx. 65 courses during Bachelor) were commented and compared to similar studies abroad, where the obligatory modules are less than half of the aforementioned. The duration of the studies was also criticised on the basis of prevailing theory. Curricula should be adapted to tackle the new media. The wish of the students about a fair and effective partition of their studies consists of

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one-third theory (e.g. ethics of journalism), one-third sector journalism, so they can focus on a specific field of reporting (e.g. economy, law or foreign affairs), and one-third practical training.

Expanding the practical training:

Communication with experienced journalists and guest lecturers is of high value for the students. In accordance with the professors' observations, those contacts are much appreciated and give a current perspective of the everyday work in newsrooms and editorials.

Improving conditions for internships:

Currently, an internship is often compulsory and has to be completed within a fixed time during the journalism studies. The students are confronted with difficulties in finding suitable ones which also fit their own preferences. Therefore, they are asking the faculties to develop long-term cooperation with media outlets which can help them doing intern- and traineeships.

Furthermore, they wish for regulated conditions for the internship period in order to gain target knowledge and to make sure to be coached well. Internship should not be mandatory and appraised with bonus (not obligatory) credit points only. This would give more freedom and effectiveness to the choice of internship, made through motivation, not obligation.

Dividing PR from journalism: There is a tendency for the journalism education in the region to be unified with other disciplines. Journalism is often combined with courses for public relations, communications and marketing. This may give a multifunctional flavour of the studies and offer broader choice for students' future occupation, but also may cause misinterpretation of the purpose of journalism. The young professionals would prefer to have separate studies with a specific focus either on PR or journalism.

Improving the communication in faculties:

Notable is the communication gap between professors and students. Courses tend to be overcrowded. Anonymity is an obstacle for having quality contact with the professors that have a mentor's role, especially in the first years of university education. The improvement of this factor depends highly on the number of students and modules in the journalism programmes.



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Adding practical courses: Curricula can be improved by adding courses such as rhetorical skills, camera training for future anchors, entrepreneurial journalism, media management, etc.

Students' newspapers: First journalistic experiences at the student's newspaper are a very useful practice and should be acknowledged by the faculties.

Establishment of alumni platforms: Such platforms and annual meetings with alumni may lead to mentorships and give valuable insights into various kinds of journalism jobs. In spite of the positive effects of networking with former students that now work in the field, alumni platforms are not very popular in South East Europe so far.