

African Value.

A report on the second World Journalism Education Congress, 5-7 July, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

Executive summary:

Almost 300 delegates to the 2010 WJEC held in South Africa came away with much deepened experience and knowledge about global and African issues that are relevant to journalism education. This was made possible through the build-up to the event, the unified efforts of many individuals at the School of Journalism and Media Studies (JMS) at Rhodes University (host institution), a partnership with the Highway Africa conference as the implementation agency, many sponsors including the International Marketing Council (and SA Tourism), and a vibrant structure and set of speakers. In sum, the Congress represents the kind of value that Africa can add to global journalism education, and vice versa. A momentum has been created which is set to result in many concrete follow-ups.

1. Motivation for hosting the Congress

The first WJEC was held in Singapore in June 2007, and much had changed in three years. Hence, Rhodes successfully proposed the theme of the event to the WJE Council as “Journalism education in an age of radical change”. This theme recognised changes in media business models, technology, and the information environment, as well as global issues like culture, identity, climate, armed conflict, pollution, and financial crisis. It made sense to examine how these were impacting upon journalism education in different parts of the world.

A second reason for Rhodes’ interest in hosting the event was to shift the locus for a follow-up event from Asia to Africa. Motivating this was the fact that of some 200 African journalism schools, only three had staffers present in Singapore – making for a total of five African journalism educators in attendance. Rhodes saw it as important that African journalism-education issues be integrated into mainstream international discussions. These are issues like interpreting and teaching journalism as a normative practice in a context that is often globally marginalised and also characterised by democratic deficits, low media densities and internet penetration, high levels of pluri-lingualism, and conditions of HIV and poverty. A key issue is also how journalism education relates to the global imaging of Africa, along with the race and identity assumptions that go with this. These are all issues that non-African educators could be educated about. Seen from the other side, African journalism educators could use the event to learn directly from global peers as well as begin to aggregate African knowledges in order to increase the impact of journalism education within the continent.

Much prior work had been done by Rhodes JMS in regard to journalism education more broadly. Seven colloquia had been convened over five years, and School head Guy Berger had used a sabbatical period to work with UNESCO on surveying African journalism schools and co-ordinating a process (with the

French ESJ of Lille) whereby they could generate criteria for excellence. This resulted in 19 schools being recognised by UNESCO as having significant potential, one of which was Rhodes (independently identified by ESJ). A UNESCO meeting in March 2008 brought together the 19 schools in Grahamstown, an event that then agreed to support Rhodes putting in a bid to host a second WJEC. All this generated a degree of credibility and confidence around Rhodes' ability to pull this off. UNESCO wrote a letter of support for the bid, as did the World Association of Newspapers and the South African Department of Communications. That fact that Rhodes had successfully hosted more than a dozen annual Highway Africa conferences was also a factor in favour of the bid.

When the WJE Council voted in favour, preparations unfolded rapidly. In September 2009, an "African Prepcom" was convened in Grahamstown (the day after Highway Africa that year) with 80 African journalism educators attending and 38 peer-reviewed papers being presented. This event gave the educators a taste of Highway Africa, and helped to galvanise their interest in the 2010 Congress. The feedback in Prepcom colloquium sessions helped participants to re-work and improve their papers for re-submission to WJEC.

2. Nitty-gritty – the practicalities and processes

The decision to host the WJEC was taken at a full JMS staff meeting in 2008. As part of preparing for the bid to present to the WJE Council, a lot of work went into securing statements of support from potential funders, and into planning and marketing. What is worth noting at this point, however, is that several months prior to the Congress actually taking place, a JMS staff meeting brainstormed in response to the questions:

- How do we define maximum success for WJEC?
- What are the critical success factors?

The responses were as follows:

- Pull off what we have planned and committed to.
- Host an event that is a step-up from 1st WJEC.
- Improve journalism education through networking for synergies.
- Generate and diffuse a greater sense of where journalism education is going in a different world.
- Be able to market the event such that it "surfs the wave" of the Festival and the World Cup, and yet still stands out – and say something about the 40th anniversary of JMS.
- Use the occasion for research, and also to develop more medium-term collaborations and networking.
- Keep a record of the lessons shared at WJEC, so that the papers presented and insights gained are not dissipated. This would entail producing an enduring and accessible archive resource that people could come back to.

- Use the momentum from this “South”-oriented event to carry into international journalism-educational discussion, and get the “North” to recognise the resources from South.
- Get the UNESCO network of recognised African schools consolidated, and expand the number of African schools within a broader imagined community of practitioners of journalism education on the continent.
- Synergise the African momentum with a strengthened Forum of African Media Educators.
- Not make a financial loss.

The staff volunteered to take responsibility for championing particular areas of work, with a fulltime conference manager (Sibusiso Mtshali) reporting to overall convenor (Guy Berger), and with temporary student staff to be brought in to assist in implementation. The “Focus co-ordinators” ensured the success of:

SA Tourism’s African Market night on Wednesday 8 July;
 Exhibitions of student work;
 Books and journals on sale, and book launches;
 Media, livecasting, and special signage
 Rhodes Journalism Review special edition
 Greening the event
 “Captive” (a parallel student media conference)
 Post Congress Tourism offerings
 Minutes of WJE Council meetings and table “themes” during meals
 Corporate gifts and awards (from Media24, and two game reserves)
 Registration; financial administration, technical support, transport.

Other staff assisted in identifying sponsor-worthy delegates, and with VIP liaison during Congress. The Highway Africa team led by Chris Kabwato gave invaluable support. Overall, the list of names reveals the active involvement and voluntary hard work of most staffers. This is an achievement of note, not least because many staffers had been deeply engaged in a fortnight of intense media mentoring and production around the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown immediately before the WJEC. The way that colleagues pulled together proved to be a manifestation of the culture climate within JMS.

3. The event itself

A dedicated website (<http://wjec.ru.ac.za>) was built for the Congress by Thomas Kapena, and proved to be an important tool for informing potential delegates and registering actual delegates. Amongst the high profile delegates who were attracted were:

Michael Bromley (University of Queensland); Geneva Overholser (University of Southern California)
 Karen Dunlap (Poynter Institute), Wijananda Jayaweera (UNESCO), Ding Junjie (Communications
 University of China), Kaarle Nordenstreng (University of Tampere), Rosental Alves (University of Texas),

Anna McKane (City University and European Journalism Trainers Association), Beate Josephi (Edith Cowan University), Ibrahim Saleh (University of Cape Town), Kwame Karikari (Media Foundation of West Africa), Herman Wasserman (University of Sheffield), Alfred Opubor (Comed, Benin).

The decision was taken, with WJE Council encouragement, to link the Congress with a pre-existing event. This was the 14th Highway Africa conference, which overlapped for the three days – with some joint plenaries, as well as shared meals and social occasions. One enormous advantage of this synergy was that the Congress could piggyback on many of the sponsors accumulated over the years by Highway Africa. Scholarships were obtained from numerous sponsors to enable some 120 educators to attend, mainly from developing countries and young democracies.

Amongst the 22 sponsors of WJEC activities specifically were: Absa, Telkom, International Marketing Council, SA Tourism, Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Open Society Foundation of South Africa, UNISA press, Mappp-seta, Organisation de la Francophonie, French Embassy, US embassy, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Knight Foundation, Open Society Institute, Open Society Institute of Southern Africa, Open Society Institute of West Africa, Icann, Hanban, Juta Academic, Inland Newspapers Association, UNESCO, Trust Africa, Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Vikes Foundation. But WJEC delegates also benefited enormously from sponsorship for Highway Africa from MTN, Makana Municipality, Comed and the Department of Communication also benefited the WJEC.

Another factor taken into account in planning the Congress was to locate it during the latter phases of the World Cup, and immediately after the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. These provided a sense of context outside of the conference's immediate concerns and venues.

A large number of extra events were arranged to take place alongside the WJEC – and alongside Highway Africa which itself had numerous associated and parallel events. These included:

- 2 x meetings of the WJE Council
- 1 x "Friends of Poynter" gathering
- 1 x WJEC book committee meeting
- 1 x journal editors meeting
- 1 x tweet-up
- 1 x Captivate conference (with students from Rhodes, UKZN, and two groups of visiting US students)

Amongst specific African value-add events were:

- 2 x courses: African journalism educators in how to teach new media
- 1 x course African journalism educators in how to teach economics journalism
- 1 x training Africans journalism educators in academic research paper writing
- 1 x UNESCO African Centres workshop
- 1 x meeting of FAME members
- Exhibitions – including one by the Rwanda Project
- Book and journal sales – including several African media journals

Daily newsletter, website blogs – including much content by and about African journalism educators
5 book launch events – 4 of which were African publications

The WJEC2 attendance numbers as a whole were more than double those from Singapore (estimated at 150). Of the 393 delegates in attendance, 170 were African. (Separately, at Highway Africa, 260 delegates were registered – scaled down from the usual 500 in order to accommodate the WJEC numbers). Of the 54 countries at WJEC, 23 were African. The Congress had almost 170 abstracts proposed, of which 139 were accepted. A total of 90 papers were actually presented (and distributed on the conference souvenir flashstick that was sponsored by Mapp-seta). Within these global figures, 57 African abstracts accepted, and 44 were presented.

Besides the paper presentations in the Conference, there were also six panel sessions – five of which involved African speakers. There were 16 syndicate groups (1 focussing on Africa specifically), and African educators spread across all of these. The event also saw the launch of a draft model syllabus for a course in Reporting Africa compiled by Fackson Banda and others, and supported by UNESCO.

African issues were also prominent at the start and the end of the event. Thus Advocate Pansy Tlakula, African Union's Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, called on educators and journalists to regard GLBT sexual orientations (a controversial issue in some African countries) as part of the exercise of freedom of expression. They also heard Bishop Desmond Tutu call on journalism Schools to promote press freedom and saw him become the first dignitary to sign the 'Table Mountain Declaration' that calls for an end to insult laws and criminal defamation in Africa. Tutu's signing up to this cause showed the global media industry (WAN and WEF) that journalism educators could contribute to a campaign that had hitherto been confined to the media industry largely.

In general, all this illustrates how the WJEC helped particularly to bring African educators into the centre of global journalism education, contributing their experiences and contacts to the global community and empowering this constituency with identity, knowledge and relationships both internally and outside of Africa.

4. Some shortfalls

Air travel was a problem in some cases – not only with the inflated costs, during the World Cup, but also the availability of flights to Port Elizabeth. The South African diplomatic stations in Nigeria proved disastrous for many delegates seeking visas from there.

Logistics initially were problematic. The biggest issue was a lack of a common database to co-ordinate the very complex matter of matching delegates with their preferred accommodation. Arranging transport to the accommodation was also tricky in some cases. On the 2nd day, things began to be resolved.

A second problem was the failure to provide Chinese translation. Courtesy of the Hanban, Jinan University sent across two translators, but they got cold feet and returned home. Two substitutes were recruited at short notice by the Confucius Institute to try and fill the gap, but the candidates were not effective at the demands of simultaneous translation. However, French translation went smoothly.

Third, the conference schedule required the scrapping of a planned World Café event aimed at helping delegates get to know each other and see the value of difference. As a result, WJEC2 did not succeed as well as it might have in terms of getting delegates to meet across chasms of experience, resource differences, countries and language. Many delegates did not get beyond bonding along the lines of nationality or language, thereby falling short of exploring the extensive bridging and linking social capital made possible by such a diverse range of participants.

Greening of the conference was poor, and lack of capacity also meant an opportunity to conduct research with the attendees was missed.

Finally, the organised live streaming of much of the proceedings failed due to problems experienced by the SA University internet network after the undersea cable that they utilise went down for several days.

5. Highlights

As indicated, a major achievement was having the WJEC happen as such, and then introducing African flavours to it in a way that made it a very distinctive gathering of journalism educators. The same applied to the knowledge shared and generated about the role of educators in regard to many contemporary global issues, and not least in regard to African issues (including media freedom and freedom of expression).

The World Cup provided an exciting backdrop, especially on two nights of the conference when a Fan-park operated for the delegates. At the same time, delegates also heard critiques of the mega-event, providing them with a balanced understanding of what it meant, including for the international image of South Africa and Africa.

Beyond the WJEC event itself, various benefits have emerged:

For Rhodes JMS, staffers worked very well together to make the event a success, thereby strengthening internal relations and school identity. In the process, the work also ensured revitalised displays in the labs, a new corporate banner and AMM tour book; plus a tour brochure around media destinations in Grahamstown. The event also consolidated several relationships for student and staff exchanges, and inspired one delegate to apply for a Fulbright scholarship to be based at Rhodes. A possible partnership with the SPI and the University of Arizona is another outcome. A colloquium – perhaps linked to a book on Africanising journalism curriculum (a topic of many papers at WJEC) – is possibly on the cards for 2011, as are follow up workshops on teaching economics journalism and teaching new media. Overall,

most of the measures of success outlined before the Congress were achieved, and evaluations by delegates gave testimony to this. (A separate report is being prepared about the evaluations).

Overall, for the delegates who attended, there was enormous international value gained through sharing knowledge about burning issues held in common or concentrated in particular regions. That is now available on the web archive. Non-Africans were able to experience “Africa” (or at least aspects of it and its journalism educators as well as Highway Africa journalists). The event mobilised African journalism educators to be better integrated within themselves as a sector, and be better integrated with the wider global imagined community. One follow-up is UNESCO support for a workshop on the issue of journalism education and indigenous languages in South Africa. The WJEC2 showed very clearly that a region hosting the WJEC can benefit enormously in terms of building up that region’s journalism education capacity and connections.

As a result of the success of WJEC 2 it is now a certainty that there will be third event. The year 2013 is set to be the host year. This is a tribute to the way the 2010 event created enormous enthusiasm for a WJEC3 – and beyond, with several potential venues now in the offing. Many enduring connections were made at WJEC2, and along with the amount of knowledge transferred, this meant a degree of materialising a more representative international community. That journalism educators could come together and take each other seriously generated a great sense of purpose and excitement. This sentiment now extends to stakeholders like African journalists, donors and foundations, and global groups like WAN and WEF.

In terms of looking ahead, the WJE Council itself has been invigorated by the Congress, and is planning several activities. One is a possible statement on a post-Congress problem of press freedom coming under pressure in South Africa itself. Another is lending its name to further capacitation of African journalism scholarship via workshops on research and writing academic papers. New impetus has been given to a WJE book project, conceived back in 2007 and stalled since. The WJE Council is also keen to extend the length and scope of its existing census of programmes internationally, to embrace training centres alongside the existing university-based institutions. Further, there is an idea for a select colloquium of leading educators before the next WJEC. Finally, there is a proposal to work with UNESCO and WAN/WEF to promote international link-ups (using the WJE online census database) around each May 3, World Press Freedom Day.

Finally, UNESCO’s own interest in helping to capacitate the sector of journalism educators in Africa and also more broadly, has been revamped, and journalism educators here themselves been re-energised about the importance of global networks that include a significant presence of participants from outside the developed countries. All this can only be good for journalism education around the world. That in turn and most importantly, will be good for the global public.

ANNEXURE:

54 countries, 23 from Africa.

1. Ghana
2. DRC
3. Mozambique
4. Cameroon
5. Zimbabwe
6. Kenya
7. Nigeria
8. Uganda
9. Madagascar
10. Tunisia
11. Morocco
12. Senegal
13. Burkina Faso
14. Botswana
15. Lesotho
16. Malawi
17. Zambia
18. Tanzania
19. Rwanda
20. South Africa
21. Benin
22. Namibia
23. Ethiopia

OTHER:

1. Australia
2. Germany
3. Chile
4. Colombia
5. Brazil
6. Mexico
7. USA
8. Canada
9. China
10. Netherlands
11. Singapore
12. Indonesia
13. India
14. Sweden
15. UK
16. France

17. Russia
18. Iraq
19. Oman
20. Albania
21. Macedonia
22. Hungary
23. Slovenia
24. Czech Republic
25. India
26. Bangladesh
27. New Zealand
28. Moldova
29. Belgium
30. Finland
31. Philippines