

Transformation of journalism education: Posttotalitarian (re)construction of journalism education in 1990s in the Czech Republic

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The necessity to build a new journalism education seemed to be one of important dimensions of the transformation process in countries of former Soviet sphere after the end of Cold war in early 1990s. The system of journalism education was quite well developed in former U.S.S.R. and its satellites and was in fact built up on very similar model with „(Marxist-Leninist) theory of journalism“ as a theoretical framework and with clearly defined role of a journalist as a propagandist, disseminator of communist ideology. Using the Czech Republic (former Czechoslovakia) as an example, the contribution analyzes the process of transformation of Czech journalism education from the old “Soviet” model to a new one. The process can be divided into three phases: (1) transition from old model, (2) acceptance and adoption of features and aspects of U.S. and European models of journalism education, and (3) stabilization of new “national” model. The whole process of transition and transformation of journalism education took (or has taken) place in the period of deep technological change of the whole profession based on digitalization and computerization. Societies in transition struggle both challenges: new political, professional and social environment and new technology.

At least two different routes can be tracked down in the process of transformation of journalism education: (a) the reconstruction of existing pre-1989 journalism education and (b) establishing new schools and programs in 1990. Especially in the reconstruction of pre-1989 education training within the framework of Charles University in Prague and Comenius University in Bratislava, the influence of international aid is highly visible. The shift from academic field towards vocational training can be tracked down, too. New schools with journalism education programs were mostly private ones and blended journalism education with other “media communication” elements (advertising, marketing, public relations). Working journalists were expressing remarkable lack of interest in journalism education during the whole period.

Key words: journalism education, media transition, post-communist media, Czech Republic

The end of Cold War in late 1989 threw countries of former Soviet bloc into a period of transformation of almost all social institutions, social practices and social values. Soviet bloc was formed by countries with very different historical development and social and cultural background, as well as geographical position and ties to other countries and cultures. For this reason, the process of transformation took place in quite a specific way in each respected country. On a very general level some common features of the transformation can be mentioned: establishing market and (re)establishing private ownership, new legal framework, changes in educational system, etc. Restructuring of media system belongs to the list of basic changes, too, and is understood as one of the key processes of transformation, indicating the level and quality of the whole social change (Paletz, Jakubowicz 2003, Südösd, Bajomi-Lázár 2003, Jakubowicz 2007). A close attention is paid to the transformation of media system but much less attention is paid to the changes in education of media professionals, especially journalists in post-communist countries. However, it is quite clear that part of the whole process of transformation was abandoning the old system of journalism education and building a new one.

The system of journalism education was quite well developed in former U.S.S.R. and its satellites and was in fact built up on shared model with „(Marx-Leninist) theory of journalism“ as a theoretical framework and with clearly defined role of a journalist as a propagandist, disseminator of communist ideology. In practice, the “theory of journalism” was in many aspects designed as a critique of fundamental texts used within journalism

education in “Western countries” (for instance “four theories of the Press”, see Hudec 1982) refusing the concept of objectivity and neutrality and claiming the political engagement and awareness to be the basic professional value of a journalist. Such model could not continue after 1989 in countries which started the process of democratization and incorporated freedom of expression and press in their constitutional order. In all countries of the sphere of influence of former Soviet Union, the transformation of journalism education took place in some form. What was the process of transformation successful? Was it supported by media and journalists and has it become part of the professionalization of journalism in respected countries? Using Czech Republic (former Czechoslovakia)¹ as an example, the contribution analyzes the process of transformation Czech journalism education from the old “Soviet” model to a new “liberal” one. First, a short overview of the transformation of Czech media after 1989 will be offered. Then we will focus on journalism education, its historical development, situation before 1989 and the changes after 1989.

The transformation of Czech media after 1989²

In the late 1980s, the main features of Czech (Czechoslovak) media system followed the main characteristics of the “Soviet model” (Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, 1963). The mass media were instruments for the implementation of the policy of the Communist Party, and one of their tasks was to unify public opinion and campaign in the favour of the party. Private ownership of the media was impossible, and only political and social organizations and government institutions were allowed to publish newspapers and magazines. The broadcast media, radio and television, were established and controlled by the state. The mass media played a propagandist role, defined as formative and informational function.

In terms of its structure, the Czech (Czechoslovak) media system was relatively rich. In 1988 Czech readers could choose from as many as 30 national and regional dailies.³ Ideological unity and fulfilment of the social role of the media were ensured by the fact that all the publishers were members of the National Front, an umbrella organization controlled by the

¹ Czech Republic was established on January 1, 1993 as a successor of former Czechoslovakia (which was established in 1918).

² The subchapter is based on the article Jiráček, Jan, Köpplová, Barbara: *The reality show called democratization: transformation of the Czech media after 1989*. *Global Media Journal*. 2008, 4/1 (Spring), p. 7-23

³ The Czech *Rudé právo* and Slovak *Pravda* dailies were issued by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and Communist Party of Slovakia respectively, *Svobodné slovo* daily by the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, and *Lidová demokracie* daily by the Czechoslovak People's Party. The Socialist Union of Youth issued the dailies *Mladá fronta* in the Czech and *Smena* in the Slovak Republics, Czech *Práce* and Slovak *Práca* were dailies of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, the Czechoslovak Union of Physical Education and Sports issued *Československý sport* daily, the Ministry of Agriculture had its own daily called *Zemědělské noviny*, and *Obrana lidu* was the daily of the Ministry of National Defence.

Communist Party. Each region (higher administrative unit) had one daily and each district (lower administrative unit) one weekly. Quite popular were some evening papers coming out in metropolitan areas. The offer of magazines in both the Czech and the Slovak Republics was relatively rich, too. At the end of the 1980s it included a wide range of periodicals targeting various demographic and interest groups: children of pre-school and school age and teenagers, women, motorists, gardeners, dog breeders, etc. Family magazines were represented, too, as were magazines of cultural and political focus. The Czechoslovak audiences had to make do with the programmes of the state-controlled *Czechoslovak Television* and *Czechoslovak Radio*. Czechoslovakia had two tv broadcasting networks covering its entire territory, and a third started being built at the end of the 1980s. The radio had three nationwide stations plus a network of regional ones, copying the administrative division of the country's territory into regions. The offer of radio and television programmes was a mixture of mediocre and above-average works of art (from drama productions to films and poetry recitals), political "popular education" (with propaganda pervading newscasts and entertaining programmes alike), serials of domestic and foreign provenance and vaudeville-type entertainment for the mainstream audience. The relatively well-advanced media did not offer all types of production – sensational, tabloid media and pornographic production did not exist. Also symptomatic of the time was the virtual absence of internal competition (though the offer was relatively varied in terms of type, each type usually had only one representative), and a high degree of centralization of management. Czech society entered the transformation process as one whose demand for media production was to a large extent saturated, and with the idea that in a democratic environment the media should be as deregulated as possible. This assumption drew inspiration from the tradition of the period between the two world wars, and from memories of the role and position of the media in the second half of the 1960s – the period of the Prague Spring.

At the most general level, the transformation of the Czech mass media after 1989 proceeded from the social and political transformation from a society denying the principles of liberal democracy into one which espouses these principles as its unchallenged foundation. In the first place it was necessary to shield the media and their functioning from potential direct interventions of the state and political power. At the very beginning of the 1990s the media started rapidly changing, as the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia lost its leading role in society, till then defined in the Constitution, and censorship was abolished. What changed first of all was the content of media output. The transformation of content was followed by establishing a clearly defined independence of media of the state (denationalization was seen

as the basic condition of their democratization). In the next stage the printed media were privatized and the dual principle was introduced in the broadcasting sector. Two new types of radio and television were thus established: radio and television of “public service”, and private radio stations and TV channels. Partial privatization of frequencies, or of networks which had been state-controlled till then, for instance by the handover of the former federal channel of Czech Television to the commercial sector, took place at the same time. The media legislation was gradually adapted to this development. The so-called Press Act from the mid-1960s was relatively soon amended (a new one had not been adopted until 2001), new legislation regulated the rights and obligations of broadcasters, and a series of other legal norms (regulating for instance advertising) were introduced. Oversight bodies were gradually created. The emergence of private media brought foreign owners into the Czech media industry and with them also investments into new technologies, as the existing technical equipment was obsolete. A number of private owners from many countries (Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States etc.) have taken turn in the Czech media since 1990. The most typical feature of the reshaped Czech media scene is that those types of media production which are not oriented on profit making do not prosper on it. As a result of this development, the Czech media sector now has the following principal features: (a) clear dominance of foreign owners of print media, (b) absence of quality press and hypercommercialization of most media, (c) predominance of private radio stations and television channels, (d) unstable and declining position of the “public service” media, and (e) a relatively fast introduction of technological innovations. Czech mass media system is highly dependent on market success. The media are driven by the need to generate profit, optimize their cost-effectiveness and use all means to consolidate their position – and hence by the degree of their incorporation in the political sphere. Their success rate is increasingly measured by the basic ratios of their (immediate or medium-term) economic achievements – the level of their marketed production, the size of their reading, listening and viewing public, market share. The decisive economic context of the transformation is no doubt represented by the development of the business sphere and the number of foreign producers and service providers entering the country – and the resulting expansion of the advertising market. The importance of the media as a factor of democratization of society has been pushed to the background in this process, and has become little more than a tool for publishers and broadcasters to gain the largest possible entrepreneurial autonomy and secure for themselves conditions of the lowest possible market regulation.

Educating journalists

Journalism education in the Czech society has quite a long tradition. Very first occasional courses were organized in late 1880s. In the academic year 1912-13, a regular set of political science courses offered by *České učení pro politické vědy* (Czech School of Politics) was enriched by elective courses designed for working journalists. The courses were focused on the legal framework of the journalistic vocations, journalism history, journalistic techniques and newspaper management, including administration, promotion and advertising. The development of journalism education continued after World War I. For the academic year 1921-22, a two-year study program for journalists was prepared at Charles University but never became a reality. In the academic year 1928-29, the *Svobodná škola politických nauk* (Free School of Political Studies) was founded in Prague as the first institution designed specifically for educating journalists. By definition, the school was a mid-career centre aimed at educating working journalists. The courses were offered until the beginning of World War II but were suspended under the Nazi occupation and revitalized after 1945 (Jirák, Köpplová, 2006).

In 1948 the Communist Party became the ruling party. For journalism education, it marks a period of development from occasional mid-career courses towards systematic “pre-career” journalism education, organized predominantly within the framework of a university environment. After 1948, when the Czechoslovak media adopted a Soviet-like model, journalism education changed accordingly. Pre-1948 journalism education was replaced and a new system of mid-career courses and university education was established afterwards, strongly supported by the Union of Czechoslovak Journalists, the journalistic organization established after the World War II. University journalism education began at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in Prague at the beginning of the academic year 1954-1955. In 1960, the *Institut osvěty a novinářství* (Institute of Further Education and Journalism) the continuing development of journalism education can be seen as an emancipation process within the academic environment. Journalism education struggled to establish its own department, and later its own faculty, especially at Charles University. This effort culminated in the establishment of the *Fakulta sociálních věd a publicistiky* (Faculty of Social Sciences and Journalism) in 1968. The faculty was terminated in the early 1970s, and *Fakulta žurnalistiky* (Faculty of Journalism) was established in 1972. The Faculty of Journalism was operating in close cooperation with the Communist Party and the organization of journalists. The curriculum offered by the Faculty of Journalism was a mix of academic courses and vocational training. To the academic background of lectures in the theory of

propaganda, Czech language and style and the history of journalism was added an obligatory set of courses in Marxism-Leninism. (see also Jiráček, Köppliová 1998).

Journalism education transformed

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At least two different routes can be tracked down in the process of transformation of journalism education: (a) the reconstruction of existing pre-1989 journalism education and (b) establishing new schools and programs in 1990. Especially in the reconstruction of pre-1989 education training within the framework of Charles University in Prague and Comenius University in Bratislava, the influence of international aid is highly visible (EJTA, USIA, European Tempus Program, International Journalism Initiative). The shift from academic field towards vocational training can be tracked down. New schools with journalism education programs were mostly private ones and blended journalism education with other “media communication” elements (advertising, marketing, public relations). Working journalists were expressing remarkable lack of interest in journalism education during the whole period. Czech journalists generally pay very weak attention to the traditional attributes of professionalization of journalism (professional education, professional organizations, etc.), and their thinking about journalism is framed by neoliberal ideology.

In 1990, the Faculty of Journalism at Charles University in Prague was cancelled and journalism education at Charles University became part of a newly established body – the *Fakulta sociálních věd* (Faculty of Social Sciences). The social and cultural climate of the year 1990 was not very supportive for further existence of journalism education. The “old” Faculty of Journalism was too closely associated with pre-1989 regime and representatives of Charles University believed that journalism is a study program which should be developed outside the university framework. Finally, the decision was made that journalism would be one of the programs of new university (with the argumentation that journalists should be well educated people and that the academic environment can help to overcome the dark heritage of old regime). It happened with almost no awareness of possibilities to get some inspiration

from between-war period. Most of the plans and concepts were inspired by western schools and books (both European and American), and western-like media were the only acceptable model for the society.

The concept of journalistic education has been transformed under the supervision of EJTA (European Journalism Training Association) with support of the Tempus project. The fundamental features of this change were (a) focus on vocational training (practical courses, connection with experienced journalists and “real” media, not just school media designed for exercises and training and lecturers who are very loosely connected with the professional practice) and (b) clear distinction between journalism training and any kind of “academic” background (details below). Media studies and communication in the mass media were introduced as a basic academic framework for journalism education at Charles University. The Department of Mass Communication (later renamed Department of Media Studies) and the Department of Journalism were founded in 1993. Simultaneously, other institutions started study programs for future journalists and new types of journalism education appeared in the 1990s.⁴

Character of contemporary journalism education in the Czech Republic

At present, Czech journalism education is developing in four different frameworks:

(a) study program organized by public universities, (b) non-university study program organized by schools of higher (postsecondary school) education, (c) in-house vocational training courses organized by publishers and broadcasters (both private and public), and (d) set of courses in journalism, creative writing, film and television editing or on-line production organized by private universities and non-university schools under a variety of headings like Communication in Media, Editing, Creative Writing, etc. (“journalism” is apparently not a sufficiently “sexy” word for promoting a program that students are required to pay for).

Due to previous development, contemporary journalism education in Czech Republic can be characterized as a concept with two main directions of development: first one mostly “*training orientated*”, the second one with more “*educational approach*”. Generally, study programs are developed upon a presumption that there should be (a) a theoretical background

⁴ In addition to Charles University in Prague, journalism study programs were established at other public universities and schools of higher education: Masaryk University in Brno from 1995; Palacký University in Olomouc as of 1992; and the Technical University in Ostrava from 2006. Likewise, attempts to institutionalize the “in-house” journalism education conducted by publishers or broadcasters can be witnessed during this period.

for journalists, (b) a set of courses covering professional training and (c) some courses of general education.

As a theoretical background, all programs accept media studies/mass communications/new media theory/social theory of communication as a “theoretical” background or a framework of journalistic studies. Some of them are more “media sociology” orientated, while others are more focused on “media history/media studies” or media culture studies”. The weak point of theoretical background in these programs is a lack of genuine media and journalism research analyzing the Czech situation and a subsequent heavy dependence on foreign (mainly Anglo-American) literature.

The vocational training is usually a combination of academic coursework and journalism projects on one side and internships in newsrooms, broadcast channels or news websites on the other side. School courses can be divided into two groups: lectures/courses *about* journalism as a profession (media law, journalism ethics, journalism genres, etc.) and programs/projects based upon work-study or *learning-by-doing* (school newsroom, school radio and/or TV studio, etc.). There is a strong tradition in Czech journalism education to teach “genres” (news, commentaries, columns, features, etc.), which developed most notably in the 1970s and 1980s into the so-called “theory of genres”. The main focus of this perspective is on teaching how to write/record/edit a proper piece of journalistic work. In all schools, this is the basis of practical journalistic training (accompanied by some courses on work with sources, on-line journalism and electives in various branches of journalism – sports journalism, literary or film criticism, etc.).

A wide diversity can be witnessed within the courses of general education. Some schools stick to the tradition of “journalist as a writer and educator” and focus on language and linguistics, the history of literature and cultural history, aesthetics, etc. Some schools rely more heavily on courses offered by other departments of the same school, and ask students of journalism to enroll for instance in introductions to various social sciences. Some programs at public universities are organized as “major only”, and some as “major and minor” in combination with some other program. In the latter, the courses of the second program serve as educational background for students of journalism. Clearly, the concept of “educated” journalism is far from being stabilized or unanimous.

Not coincidentally, there is a skepticism and ambivalent attitudes regarding the existence of journalism education among Czech journalists, and many of them are not willing to participate in journalism education (Volek, Jiráček: 2006).

Conclusion

The example of Czech Republic shows that transformation of journalism education in early 1990s was an “up-down” process pushed forward mostly by educators themselves, including international aid and with low support of media and other institutions and within weak framework of the “national” tradition of journalism education itself.

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