Challenging the journalistic *habitus*? Journalism students' attitudes towards journalism, mainstream and alternative media

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News journalism in crisis and the journalistic *habitus*

The fact that independent media and news journalism are in deep crisis is one of the few certainties in a period of heightened political and social uncertainty. Since its opening, on April 11, 2008, The Newseum, the interactive museum of news and journalism, has become one of the most popular attractions in Washington D.C. Built on a landmark location, with pronounced symbolic significance, between the White House and the U.S.Capitol, it has as its mission «to help the public and the news media understand one another better» and to «raise public awareness of the important role of a free press in a democratic society». Its huge popularity does not seem, however, to be in harmony with the public's appreciation of news media. Starting in the early 1990s, in USA, and gradually spreading to most Western countries, the public's trust in news media organizations is sinking; newspaper readership is falling, especially among young people, who appear less and less interested in traditional forms of news consumption. The move of classified advertising away from the press and towards online outlets threatens the established business model of newspapers; at the same time, mounting fragmentation of audiences and modified audiences' viewing habits severely affect television news. These changes force even well-established news organizations to cut budgets and lay off journalists.

These newly introduced problems in news journalism have not set in into an otherwise unproblematic field. In recent decades, the sweeping commercialization of mass media has resulted in increased time, economic and organisational pressures exerted upon professional journalists, such as increased workloads, lack of resources, insecurity of employment, and greater dependence on news agencies and PR. In a time of increasing political challenges and economic complexity, these changing conditions undermine the ability of journalists to practice "quality" journalism, that is, systematic, tenacious, in-depth coverage of significant issues that can hold powerful economic and political actors accountable. On the contrary, a precarious blend of infotainment, sensationalism and trivia is constantly on the rise, substituting "hard" news and leading to the decline of critical, investigative reporting.

Other problematic factors rest with the professional culture(s) within the journalistic field, in Bourdieuian terms, the journalistic *habitus*. A wide range of theoretical and empirical research has documented several dysfunctions which account for significant pathologies in the contemporary public spheres, such as self-censorship (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2000), political conformism of journalists (Bourdieu, 1997), the increasing homogenization of content (Boczkowski and De Santos, 2007), and a seriously curtailed agenda, which, as a rule, excludes the issues, experiences and perspectives of dissenting, minority or marginal groups and communities (Cottle, 2000; Davis, 2007; Gerbner, 1992; Gitlin, 1980; Hall et al., 1978; McLeod et el., 1999; McNair, 1995, Smith et al., 2001). The characteristics of contemporary mass media systems form a 'hegemonic' public sphere, which is associated with the production, circulation and reproduction of the

dominant public opinion and stands apart from numerous 'counterpublic spheres' of civil society.

This crisis does not affect only the realm of journalism, but has far-reaching consequences for the political role of the media and the quality of democracy at large e.g. alienation from the political sphere and rapidly decreasing levels of participation in political processes, misunderstanding and mistrust between communities and cultural groups, inadequate comprehension of issues of public concern and decline of public debate, deteriorating credibility of public institutions both on a national and a European level (Habermas, 1989).

The call for the reform of journalism education

Journalism education is often conceived of as an "agent of change" (Josephi, 2009, p. 47). In the words of Josephi (2009, p. 42),

> Journalism education is seen as improving the quality of journalism by improving the quality of journalists. […] In other words, the kind of education future journalists receive matters because journalists matter among the many factors that make up journalism.

Journalism education intends to transform preexisting practices not only by conveying knowledge to journalism students but also by molding "the perceptions journalists have of the role and function of the media" (Gaunt, 1992, p. 1, quoted in Josephi, 2009, p. 43). Furthermore, education in journalism can provide a context for interrogating the practice of journalism through "questioning journalism's customs and habits, its conventional wisdom, the common sense that gets passed down from one generation of journalists to the next" (Glasser, 2006, p. 149). Students, then, are expected to learn not only to question, but also to consider alternatives to established journalistic values and practices.

These assumptions have been backed up by some empirical evidence, such as the findings of the study conducted by Splichal and Sparks (1994, in Josephi, 2009, p. 47), who surveyed first-year journalism students in 22 countries regarding their attitudes towards journalism. This study found that even journalism students from countries whose media system was classified as partly free in terms of press freedom exhibited a high degree of idealistic conception of journalism and a strong desire for independence and autonomy. The question remains, however, whether the establishment of journalism education on academic level has had any major, observable impact on the way news journalism is practiced within media organisations.

A possible answer is provided by the findings of a recent study in China (Yu et al., 2000, p. 75, in Josephi, 2009, p. 51); this study found that there is a disconnection between the classroom and the newsroom, so that journalism ethics acquired in the classroom do not necessarily transfer to real-world practice – especially in countries considered "transitional" in their media system.

Another explanation is put forward by several scholars who question contemporary models of journalism education with regard to their ability to bring about change. The calls for the reform of journalism education focus on two core issues.

First, as Skinner et al. argue, that in many higher-education journalism schools the emphasis is on the uncritical development of skills by a "rote learning of news values" (2001, p. 345). Consequently, students do not understand the ideological dimensions of the practices of news selection, editing and presentation they learn to apply nor they realize the far-reaching consequences of their choices for actors who engage in crucial power struggles in society.

This line of criticism has aimed mainly at the "professionalism" of journalism and journalism education, in the sense of the "standardization or codification of professional knowledge" (Glasser, 1992, p. 134). Professionalization of journalism has a positive aspect, when it is linked to a public service ethics and it is expected to act as a shield for journalists against commercial pressures and political instrumentalization, and, thus, increase their autonomy (Hallin, 1997, p. 258, in Josephi, 2009, p. 48). This is highly relevant for journalism in countries whose media system is classified as belonging to the "polarized pluralism" model (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), of which Greece is a characteristic example.

Yet, there are also significant objections to professionalization and its ideological baggage. Early on, Glasser (1992, p. 131) denounces the "indifference to difference" as the "inevitable by-product of a professional education" in journalism, and argues for diversity in journalism studies, in the sense of accommodating in curricula a plurality of journalistic ethics and goals, according to differing social and cultural conditions. Another issue of contention is the "ideology of objectivity", which often goes unchallenged in formal journalism education. These professional ideals privilege certain functions of the media in the public sphere over others (e.g. contentious journalism), such as the watchdog role of the press (Brennen, 2000) and the form of investigative reporting (Ettema and Glasser, 1998; de Burgh, 2000), with little consideration of how these may naturalize the form of capitalist media and serve the status quo (in Josephi, 2009, p. 51).

Another concern with professionalism is connected with occupational status and power (Mensing, 2009) and the resulting exclusion of the public from the production of symbolic forms in the public sphere. Thus, journalism can be made "elitist and exclusive rather than inclusive" (Nordenstreng, 1998, p. 126, quoted in Josephi, 2009, p. 49) and produce stereotypical narratives of certain groups and cultures that often pervade conventional reporting. A narrow definition of journalism in terms of standardized professional values impedes a relational positioning of journalism towards audiences and communities, in the words of Birkhead "a journalism of more humility and less righteousness over the prospect of comprehending the lives of so many others" (1991, p. 238, quoted in Glasser, 1992, p. 136). As Skinner et al. (2001, p. 352) argue, "students need to learn to let subjects and events 'speak for themselves', rather than slot them into predefined social roles".

Additionally, the set of standardized skills that are taught in many journalism schools are based mostly on traditional practices (Mensing, 2009), developed under different conditions and communication environments (e.g. one-way communication and monopolistic or oligopolistic models) that turn out to be unfit for the age of the new media, where active publics, rather than passive audiences, predominate and conditions are rapidly changing (e.g. information overload, distribution through networks, abundance of information channels, free information flows, and interactive communication). The vast majority of mainstream media adheres to an antagonistic or eroding logic towards new media, by selectively assimilating their features to create a semblance of participation and interaction (Davis, 2000). Much of contemporary discussion is trapped in a false dilemma, seeing user-generated content as a substitute for well-resourced newsgathering carried out within trusted institutions, and a conception of new media and citizen/alternative journalism as potential threats to the practice of journalism and established professional values. In short, "professionalism is a question that should be thoroughly explored and tested and remade in journalism schools, not delivered as an embedded ideology" (Mensing, 2009).

Second, Skinner et al. (2001) make a significant point. They argue that even when critical and cultural studies are included in the journalism programmes and the values and practices that constitute the journalistic *habitus* are challenged, there is a considerable gap, a discontinuity between theory and practice that does not easily allow students to make the connections themselves and develop self-reflexivity:

> "Simply putting skills-based training and liberal arts courses side-by-side doesn't show students how to apply those ideas and concerns in the context of social communication in general and journalism in particular" (p. 349).

Scholars that call for reform in journalism education along these lines, expect that as students learn to identify how specific cultural, political and economic forces structure the practice of journalism, they will be more able as professional journalists not only to resist, but also work to overcome those constraints (Skinner et al., p. 351, 354-355). On the contrary, in the absence of critical reflection towards inherited attitudes and practices, and without the opportunity to experiment with alternative ways of doing journalism during study and practicum, it is unreasonable to expect that young professionals will devise efficient practices of resistance to, let alone transformation of, malpractices in the "real world" of journalism practice (Mensing, 2009). It should be noted, however, that, while these interventions are of crucial importance for rethinking journalism and education, if they are not coupled with a rigorous critique of the all-pervasive profit-making logic of current media organizations, they end up placing responsibility for reform solely on individual journalists (MacDonald, 2006). Thus, attempts to cultivate 'resisting journalists' in journalism education should develop in tandem with attempts to constraining the power structures that permeate everyday journalism practice.

The case-study of Greek journalism students: aims and methods

The theoretical discussions presented above make the assumption that journalism education, focusing on a critical approach to the process of news production and engaging a (critical) theory-informed practical training, can equip journalism students with the cognitive means, the critical skills and the professional ethics that will guarantee the rise of a new generation of more self-reflexive professional journalists.

Within this theoretical context, we set out to explore Greek journalism students' attitudes towards journalism. In particular, we set the following research questions: First, how do journalism students view the journalistic profession? Are they motivated by idealistic conceptions of journalism (cf. Splichal and Sparks, 1994) or are they attracted by the prospect of a glamorous career (Spyridou and Veglis, 2008, p. 69)? Second, how do third- and four-year journalism students position themselves against the journalistic *habitus*? Do they distance themselves from and criticize perceived dominant professional ethics and practices, to the point of thinking that they will engage in conflict with the established *status quo* in journalism? Do they feel they can make a change in journalism or are they ready to conform to the conventional way of thinking and doing things in the newsroom? Third, how are students' attitudes towards journalism and its *habitus* connected to the importance students attach to specific sets of journalistic values and their evaluations of mainstream and alternative media?

Empirical research on journalism students' cultures is scant in the literature. Among the few exceptions is the study of Sparks and Splichal (1989), conducted almost two decades ago, who studied the beliefs, expectations and motivations of first-year journalism students across 22 countries of very different social, economic and media systems. The findings of this study revealed no systematic differences "in the symbolic world of the students", that is, in the students' attitudes towards journalism, their values and their interests, as a result of the political system in which they lived and its official ideology (Sparks and Splichal, 1989, p. 35). The differences lay on the students' evaluation of the objective media reality, in terms of the freedom of the press and the various pressures exerted upon journalists, according to whether they lived in a "commercial" or "paternal" media system (Sparks and Splichal, 1989, p. 32-33). According to this study, "the student journalist perceives her or his

role as that of a professional who will encounter external obstacles in the exercise of that profession" (Sparks and Splichal, 1989, p. 39-40).

In terms of professional journalism practice, Greece is an interesting case, since the model of factual, objective journalism coexists with traditional forms of interpretative journalism according to firm political loyalties in a media landscape where efficient implementation of media regulation laws is still pending. Three public journalism schools were established in the beginning of the 1990s, within a general move towards the professionalization and the improvement of the quality of journalism. In general, Greek journalism schools maintain a balance between theory and practice, including both critical communication studies and practical training courses – albeit as largely disconnected domains.

The study was conducted with the use of a specially designed questionnaire, which was distributed to a sample of 274 students of the three Greek public Journalism/Media/Communication Studies university departments[1], which represents almost about a third of the population. Only third- and four-year students were selected, since they were more likely to be "socialized" to journalistic practices through university education and/or during their practicum. Given that this was a convenience sample, which was taken by the students who attended courses in the day of the survey, the sample may overrepresent the students that are most attentive and devoted to their studies.

The questionnaire is comprised of 181 questions, divided in eight distinct parts: (a) Demographics (b) Intention to enter the journalistic profession and work experience or practicum (c) Media consumption habits, interest in news areas, content creation in the media, internet presence (d) Evaluation of mainstream and alternative media (e) Perceptions about journalism and the journalistic *habitus* (f) Journalistic values (g) Use of alternative media in studies and instructors' attitudes towards alternative media (h) Political participation. Five-grade Likert scales were used to measure frequency of media consumption habits, evaluation of media, and perceptions about journalism and journalistic values; the reliability of scales (Cronbach's alpha) for all sections ranged from .658 to .863. The data were analyzed with SPSS.

Research findings

Perceptions about journalism and the journalistic habitus

Students' perceptions about journalism and their motivations and expectations from the profession were measured by the use of six questions. By means of exploratory factor analysis, the variables were grouped into two categories[2]: (a) Instrumentalist approaches to journalism (Cronbach's α=.737), which included motivations based on personal gains (wealth, fame, and political power); (b) Idealist approaches to journalism (Cronbach's α=.809), which included altruistic perceptions about the mission of journalists (exposing injustice and fraud, defending the weak, and struggling for one's ideals).

To answer the second research question, that is, to measure how critical students were vis-à-vis the perceived established ideas and practices of professional journalists, six items were used (agreement or disagreement with opinions aired in mainstream media, framing of issues, mainstream media agendas, and professional journalists' perceptions). These questions formed a single category: Critical approaches to dominant journalistic practices (Cronbach's α=.734). In addition, two more questions were posed to assess the extent to

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[1] It should be noted that only one Department offers formal specialization in journalism, while the other Departments only offer relevant courses. However, their graduates often choose to follow the journalistic profession.
[2] Based on the factor analyses, new variables were computed by the means of the questions that comprised each factor.

which students thought they would engage in conflict with dominant perceptions in journalism and the extent to which they thought that as professional journalists they would have to conform to dominant practices in journalism.

An examination of the mean values of these categories, together with the two individual questions regarding the students' readiness to conflict with or conform to the journalistic *habitus*, reveals a modest <u>altruistic</u> approach to journalism (Table 1). At the same time, instrumental views of journalism are of lower importance to Greek journalism students, contrary to the popular view that there is a persistent dichotomy between social responsibility and a glamorous career among Greek journalism students (cf. Spyridou and Veglis, 2008, p. 69).

Table 1

Approaches to journalism and journalistic *habitus*	n	Mean (Likert 1-5)	SD
Idealist approaches	270	3.50	1.007
Instrumentalist approaches	270	2.28	.831
Critical approaches	270	3.96	.625
"… because of my opinions I will engage in conflict with dominant perceptions in journalism"	268	3.58	1.066
"… as professional journalist I will have to conform to dominant practices in journalism"	270	2.42	1.205

On the other hand, students are <u>quite critical</u> (mean: 3.96 in a scale 1-5) towards perceived dominant practices, with a self-understanding explicitly oppositional to the journalistic *habitus*. In particular, 86% of the students think that important issues are absent from mainstream media agendas. Almost as many (82%) often feel angry or very angry at the opinions aired in the mass media. A large majority (78%) often feels that they would present a topic differently from the way it is framed in the mass media. More than half (60%) often find journalists' opinions in the mass media conservative or very conservative and most of the times they disagree with the way a topic is presented in the mass media. Almost half of the students think that their understanding of journalism differs from that of most professional journalists (49%).

Given the extent to which students set themselves apart from what they perceive as the journalistic *habitus*, it is no surprise that most students (54%) foresee that they will engage in conflict with dominant perceptions in journalism, because of their opinions (Table 2). So far, these results seem to confirm the assumption that journalism education is indeed an agent of change. Yet, this optimistic understanding is moderated by the fact that only half (45%) of the "dissenters" (the students who wish to challenge the journalistic "status quo") are confident that they will not have to conform to dominant practices in journalism. Thus, a large number of students, being well aware of the "realities" of journalism, have already accepted that they will have to make compromises as professional journalists.

Table 2

Crosstabulation: Conflictual attitudes * Integration readiness			"I will have to conform…"			Total
			Disagree or strongly disagree	Undecided	Agree or strongly agree	
"I will engage in conflict…"	Agree or strongly agree	Count	65	34	46	145*
		% within "I will engage in conflict"	**45%**	23%	32%	100%

* 54% of all students

Perceptions about journalistic values

Although many students take a critical stance and differentiate themselves from current practices, it is not clear on which ground their dissention rests. In the absence of a direct comparison to professional journalists' attitudes, some inferences can be made from the examination of the relative importance students attach to specific journalistic values and practices and the relation of these evaluations to students' approaches to journalism and the journalistic *habitus*.

Students were asked to rate, in a five-grade scale, eighteen words or phrases that reflected fundamental journalistic values and practices – key concepts drawn from ongoing scholar discussions about antagonistic theoretical and epistemological approaches to journalism. By the means of exploratory factor analysis five groups of values/practices were extracted, pertinent to[3]: (a) Social Responsibility (Cronbach's α=.773) (b) Journalism Independence (Cronbach's α=.838) (c) Information Quality (Cronbach's α=.684) (d) Professionalism/Objectivity Paradigm (Cronbach's α=.603) (e) Paternalism-Elitism/Occupational Power (Cronbach's α=.687) (see Table 3 for the individual variables that are included in each category).

The first point that invites comment is that students attach importance to journalistic values in general: the total mean of all journalistic values/practices is 3.97 (in a scale 1-5). In more detail, the journalistic values students consider most important are those pertinent to the quality of information, especially the reliability of information (Table 3). The next more important is the independence of journalists from political, economic and ownership pressures.

Values pertinent to the social responsibility of journalists are the third preferred set of values, with particular emphasis on fostering critical thinking; social conscience, pluralism/diversity and the representation of citizens also score quite highly; what is less important is the coverage of marginal social groups and the newly established field of citizen journalism. The lower emphasis on the coverage of marginal social groups points at a (relatively) reduced awareness of students regarding the role of journalists in covering the underrepresented segments of society and the promotion of their interests. Students seem to give priority to the watchdog function of the press, in the sense of performing a check on government and power holders, rather than to the active engagement with the issues that marginal actors try to broach. The comparatively low importance of citizen journalism for journalism students should also be noted; although the mean score is quite high (3.76), it is

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[3] One variable ("coverage of elite groups") was excluded by the factor analysis.

still lower than many other values/practices. This might imply that journalism students are not particularly favorable to "networked" forms of journalism that stress the close cooperation of journalists and editors with publics and communities – possibly because they are not familiarized with such journalistic forms in the course of their studies.

The fourth preferred set of values refers to the much discussed notion of <u>professionalism and the objectivity paradigm</u>. Yet, there is a substantial difference between objectivity, which is considered very important by the students (mean: 4.56), and disinterestedness, which collects a mean score of 3.91. This difference is rather difficult to account for: do students believe that a journalist can be objective, without taking sides? Or that a journalist should be objective and do not let his/her personal beliefs interfere with his/her journalistic work? On the other hand, this logical inconsistency can also point at the persistence of the "myth of objectivity" in students' perceptions, possibly because it has not been adequately addressed or deconstructed in relevant class discussions. Also, the individual variable of professional journalism stands also relatively low in the students' preferences, but slightly higher than citizen journalism.

Lastly, the set of values that is of the lowest importance to journalism students refers to the exertion of influence on public opinion or the construction of public opinion. This could mean that students in general do not consent to a <u>paternalistic or elitist stance towards audiences</u> and the occupational power that this stance often signifies.

Table 3

Journalistic values	n	Mean (Likert 1-5)	SD
Information Quality	271	4.40	.576
Reliability		4.74	
Depth of analysis		4.23	
Broad information		4.22	
Journalism Independence	272	4.36	.813
Independence from political power		4.44	
Independence from economic power		4.37	
Independence from media ownership		4.29	
Social Responsibility	272	4.19	.612
Fostering critical thinking		4.65	
Social conscience		4.38	
Pluralism/diversity		4.34	
Expression/representation of citizens		4.08	
Coverage of underrepresented/marginal groups		3.91	
Citizen journalism		3.76	
Professionalism/Objectivity Paradigm	272	4.09	.763
Objectivity		4.56	
Disinterestedness/neutrality		3.91	
Professional journalism		3.80	
Paternalism-Elitism/Occupational Power	272	2.61	.965
Exertion of influence on public opinion		2.78	
Construction of public opinion		2.46	

An interesting question that arises concerns the relation between students' attitudes towards journalism and the journalistic *habitus*, on the one hand, and the students' preference for specific journalistic values and practices, on the other. For instance, which journalistic values are deemed as more important by students that hold idealistic perceptions of journalism? Are these values different for students that approach journalism instrumentally? By the same token, do the "dissenters" and the "realists" or "conformists" differ in terms of their belief in specific set of journalistic values?

To explore these relations, the correlation coefficients between these set of variables were calculated (Pearson's *r*) (Table 4). The analysis shows that idealism and instrumentalist towards journalism are needed related to different sets of values. Idealism is correlated mainly to social responsibility values (p<.001), and less to journalism independence and information quality. Also, the overall significance attached to journalistic values is a factor connected with idealistic views of journalism (p<.001). On the contrary, instrumentalism is negatively correlated to social responsibility and journalism independence, whereas it is positively correlated to paternalistic or elitist views of the audience. There is no connection to how important journalistic values in total are considered.

Table 4

Correlations	Approaches to journalism					
	Idealist approaches			Instrumentalist approaches		
Journalistic values	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	n	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	n
Social Responsibility	**.365****	<.001	270	**-.171****	.005	270
Journalism Independence	**.187****	.002	270	**-.144***	.018	270
Information Quality	**.152***	.012	269	-.054	-	269
Professionalism/Objectivity Paradigm	.018	-	270	.028	-	270
Paternalism-Elitism/Occupational Power	.053	-	270	**.284****	<.001	270
Total	**.301****	<.001	255	-.062	-	255

  **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

  *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Moving on to attitudes towards the journalistic *habitus*, critical approaches to current practices in journalism are again correlated to higher estimation of journalistic values in general. In terms of specific values, the emerging pattern is similar to that of the idealistic approach to journalism. Again, the importance students attach to social responsibility, independence of journalists and quality of information is correlated not only to critical views of the professional journalists' practices, but also to the tendency to engage in conflict with dominant beliefs. On the contrary, the importance of paternalistic or elitist views of the audience as well as of professionalism and objectivity is correlated to less critical attitudes and to the tendency to conform to dominant ideas and practices and follow the established rules of "real world" journalism.

Table 5

Correlations	Approaches to journalistic *habitus*								
	Critical approaches			Conflictual tendency			Conformity tendency		
Journalistic values	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	n	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	n	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	n
Social Responsibility	**.318****	<.001	270	**.276****	<.001	270	.019	-	268
Journalism Independence	**.387****	<.001	270	**.207****	.001	270	-.015	-	268
Information Quality	**.339****	<.001	269	**.152***	.012	269	-.026	-	267
Professionalism/ Objectivity Paradigm	-.049	-	270	.013	.827	270	**.157***	.010	268
Paternalism-Elitism/ Occupational Power	**-.124***	.042	270	-.017	.777	270	**.249****	<.001	268
Total	**.276****	<.001	255	**.208****	.001	255	.120	-	253

  **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

  *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Students' assessment of mainstream and alternative media

So far, we have explored what journalism students think about journalism and the practices of professional journalists, and how important they consider specific sets of journalistic values. An additional question is how students assess in more depth the objective media reality they encounter daily, not only as inexpert media consumers, but also as expert observers and would-be journalists. We assume that students' experiences of the media is an important factor in shaping their attitudes towards journalism, besides studying communication and media theories and receiving journalistic training within the rather 'safe' university environment. For instance, the extent to which students can encounter – besides the dominant model of large commercial media organizations – a diverse media environment, in which a range of alternative media projects can flourish and experiment with non-mainstream values and ethics of journalism, can draw up the boundaries not only of their motivations and expectations regarding their future professional life, but also of their ambitions and dreams, their creativity and imagination.

For these reasons, students were asked to answer a set of 26 questions about crucial aspects of news media in order to assess mainstream and alternative media. Because of the complexity of those terms, especially of "alternative media", which resist clear-cut definitions and delimitations, these concepts were not defined or further explained. Thus, the answers to those questions refer to the students' subjective understanding of those media types and entail – inevitably – generalized impressions of various media outlets.

Regarding mainstream media, the first finding that invites comment is that students are very disappointed with the overall quality of the mainstream media they consume. The mean of all media qualities is only 2.37 (SD=.423) in a scale of 1 to 5. More specifically, mainstream media were assessed above the threshold of 3 only in terms of their responsiveness at audience feedback (3.57), the absence of self-censorship (3.17), the delivery of lucid information (3.13) and their watchdog role against political power (3.00). For all other individual qualities, mainstream media were rated below 3, notably in terms of their objectivity (1.78) and their neutrality (1.81). By the use of exploratory factor analysis, nineteen (19) of the 26 questions were grouped in five categories, whose rating is presented in Table 6.

According to journalism students, the relatively best characteristic of mainstream media is the quality of information they offer. The next best category – but still below fair rating – is the fulfillment of media's responsibilities according to a liberal-pluralist view of their role in society; this entails, apart from performing their watchdog role, safeguarding diversity, allowing 'ordinary citizens' to express their opinions and building a critical public sphere. Lower in students' rating stands news media's occupational status as objective mediators; this includes recording and presenting facts in an impartial and objective way, knowing what is best for the people and making editorial decisions on behalf of them. The fourth category can be termed media autonomy, as it refers to media's capacity to maintain a degree of autonomy against external powers that seek to define news content (in particular, market competition and political pressures); these characteristics covary with the variables that refer to the manipulation of public opinion by the media, and the fair and ample representation of marginal groups; all five items can be seen as closely connected, as the absence of media autonomy usually implies dominance by powerful actors and their vested interests. The last category in students' assessment of mainstream media (only 1.73) is their independence from commercial interests, political interventions and ownership pressures. This is hardly surprising, if we take into account the pathologies of the Greek communication system that render journalism particularly vulnerable to commercial and state interventions.

Table 6

Assessment of mainstream media	n	Mean (Likert 1-5)	SD
Information Quality (α=.656)	272	2.86	.750
offer lucid information that I can understand	271	3.13	.917
I am broadly informed	272	2.73	.982
I get many-sided information	271	2.73	1.018
Liberal-Pluralist Role (α=.754)	273	2.49	.717
are watchdogs towards political power	271	3.00	.921
express 'ordinary citizens'	272	2.42	.973
air diverse opinions	273	2.34	.877
foster discussion and critical thinking	273	2.19	1.009
Occupational status as objective mediators (α=.732)	273	2.14	.746
professional journalists should be the ones who select, edit and deliver the news to the public	268	2.78	1.128
professional journalists know best what's good for the public	272	2.19	1.066
do neutral recording of facts	269	1.81	.882
presents facts objectively and impartially	272	1.78	.811
Media Autonomy (α=.599)	273	2.09	.571
represent marginal groups amply and fairly	272	2.37	.974
do not manipulate public opinion	272	2.08	.923
news selection is not defined by competition among media outlets	273	2.04	.850
journalists do not succumb to political pressures	269	2.00	.950
advertising and ratings do not severely affect news content	272	1.94	.918
Media Independence (α=.777)	273	1.73	.813
journalists are independent from commercial interests	270	1.80	1.011
journalists are independent from owner pressures	269	1.70	.964
journalists are independent from political interventions	269	1.67	.930

How do journalism students assess alternative media – e.g. radical media projects, independent and interactive news outlets, open fora belonging to large commercial organizations or political and news blogs? The most positive assessment refers to the degree alternative media fulfill their role as defined by a liberal-pluralist approach to media (Table 7). Alternative media are also seen as achieving a quite high degree of autonomy against external agents and representing marginal social actors as fairly and adequately. In terms of independence from commercial interests, political interventions and ownership pressures, they are rated just above average. On the other hand, just below average is their rating in terms of the quality of information they offer. The last category in students' assessment is the occupational status of alternative media as objective mediators.

Table 7

Assessment of alternative media	n	Mean (Likert 1-5)	SD
Liberal-Pluralist Role (α=.813)	256	3.64	.770
Media Autonomy (α=.661)	257	3.50	.632
Media Independence (α=.708)	257	3.04	.824
Information Quality (α=.784)	258	2.97	.747
Occupational status as objective mediators (α=.758)	257	2.85	.729

Since students answered the same set of questions for both media types, direct comparisons between their assessments are possible (Table 8). Although alternative media have better ratings in every category of media characteristics, only two of these differences are statistically significant: Information Quality and Media Independence ($p<0.05$), whereas the differences in the overall assessment is marginally insignificant.

Table 8

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) between assessments of mainstream and alternative media	Mean (Likert 1-5)		F	Sig.
	Mainstream media	Alternative media		
Information Quality	2.86	2.97	2.056	**.013**
Liberal-Pluralist Role	2.49	3.64	1.108	-
Occupational status as objective mediators	2.14	2.85	1.341	-
Media Autonomy	2.09	3.50	1.137	-
Media Independence	1.73	3.04	2.029	**.016**
Total (of scale)	42.43	61.72	1.404	(.068)

Lastly, are students' approaches to journalistic *habitus* correlated to their assessments of mainstream and alternative media? Our analysis suggests that there is a strong negative correlation between critical approaches to the journalistic *habitus* and the overall assessment of mainstream media. Also, the more negatively students view mainstream media, the more likely they are to say that they will engage in conflict with dominant norms in journalism – or vice versa. Regarding the likelihood to conform to dominant practices, while there is no relation to the assessment of mainstream media, there is a positive correlation to positive assessment of alternative media.

Table 9

Correlations	Approaches to journalistic *habitus*								
	Critical approaches			Conflictual tendency			Conformity tendency		
Assessment of media	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	n	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	n	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	n
Mainstream media	**-.528****	<.001	244	**-.333****	<.001	244	.055	-	243
Alternative media	.074	-	222	.006	-	222	**.161***	.017	221

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion and conclusions

This study was the first attempt to map journalism students' attitudes towards the profession of their choice in Greece. Its findings shed light in an understudied area of media studies and reveal how journalism students think about journalism as a profession and its journalistic *habitus*. This knowledge is of crucial importance in discussions about reforming journalism education so that it addresses contemporary challenges in the media environment.

According to our study, of third- and four-year journalism students, who have already been "socialized" to journalistic practices through university education or during their practicum, are modestly motivated by an altruistic and idealistic view of journalism. If first-year students are more likely to be motivated by idealistic conceptions of journalism, as Splichal and Sparks (1994, p. 179) found, then this modest tendency may be due to the fact that exposure to the realities of journalism have indeed moderated those views, as Splichal and Sparks (p. 182) hypothesized. At the same time, most students do not tend to approach journalism instrumentally, as a means for personal gains.

While these results are not alerting, they vindicate scholarly appeals for more ethics in the curriculum, so that students can reflect more critically in current reporting practices and be challenged to do a better job themselves (Dates, 2006, p. 144-145). Skinner et al. (2001, p. 349) argue that educators should "*refuse* to accept journalism as simple technique and, instead, emphasize that journalism is a complex professional practice that involves the application of key vocational skills as well as a critical analytic eye". Greek journalism students of our sample tend to be strongly critical to what they perceive as the journalistic *habitus* – more than half of them to the point of foreseeing that they will engage in conflict with dominant perceptions. However, journalism education as an agent of change in Greek journalism has its limits: only half from those "dissenters" are confident that they will not have to conform to dominant practices in journalism. The rest of the students adopt a realist or conformist approach, possibly acknowledging, as Papathanassopoulos (2001) argues, that the industry looks for 'followers' rather than 'innovators', so that the need for knowledge and critical thinking is overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness to bring about any major changes (cited in Spyridou and Veglis, 2008, p. 68).

In view of these findings, strengthening the moral arsenal of journalists-to-be alone may not guarantee that future journalists will be more able to resist market and institutional pressures and make a difference in the actual practice of journalism. Skinner et al. (2001) maintain that the divide between theory and practice in traditional journalism education does not help students arriving at a critical praxis. Stephens (2006, p. 150-153) suggests that journalism students should be encouraged not to imitate the profession but to experiment

with new ideas, unrestricted by commercial logic, trying out new topics and styles, and in-depth reporting on matters of significance from multiple perspectives. Although there are exceptional instances of critical journalism in commercial media reporting, the homogenization of the field leaves little room for a plurality of diverse examples in news reporting, that can inspire creativity in journalism students. In view of this scarcity, Atton's (2003) suggestion for directing our attention to alternative journalism as a useful resource for journalism education is particularly relevant here. In Atton's words:

> …alternative journalism works outside the corporate division of labour and capital and affords us an opportunity to introduce radical forms of criticism and reflexivity into journalism education. … By embedding the concepts and practices of alternative ways of doing newswork into the curriculum we might invigorate ourselves, our students and the profession, in whatever forms it might take (2003, p. 271).

Acknowledging alternative journalism's strengths should not be equated with idealizing it or implying that it could substitute mainstream journalism. Recent empirical studies reveal certain processes within alternative media projects that limit their critical function, such as the over-representation of "non-elite" at the expense of "ordinary" sources (Atton & Wickenden, 2005; Milioni, forthcoming), as well as the existence of a radical *habitus*, that can seriously impede outreach and coalition-oriented politics (Garcelon, 2006, p. 75). Sandoval & Fuchs (2010, p. 143) also stress the danger of fragmentation of the (counter)public sphere in 'alternative ghettos' or 'individualistic spaces of withdrawal'. In other words, not all alternative media projects are "at once both oppositional and constructive" (Atton, 2003, p. 271).

Despite its drawbacks, alternative journalism presents "a radical challenge to the professionalized and institutionalized practices of the mainstream media" (Atton, 2003, p. 267); its ethics stress the notions of social responsibility and collective and anti-hierarchical forms of organization of news outlets. Different types of alternative media can provide journalism education with examples of doing journalism differently and its ethics and processes can "be deployed within journalism education as *practices*" (Atton, 2003, p. 271, original emphasis). For instance, radical media projects represent a rigorous critique of commercial modes in sourcing and framing practices and stubbornly defend their independence from commercial players and the state. By practicing advocacy journalism to the benefit of underprivileged groups and communities, they show the limits of the "ideology of objectivity". Interactive media experiment with "networked forms of journalism" (Bennett, 2008; Mensing, 2009) and direct public involvement from real communities, so as to strengthen ties between journalists and citizens and increase public trust on and transparency of journalism (Borden, 2007; Ward, 2009 in Mensing, 2009).

As this study has shown, these kinds of journalistic values (such as social responsibility and media independence) are related to idealistic conceptions of journalism and to critical approaches to established practices, whereas they are negatively correlated to instrumentalist views of journalism. On the other hand, elitist stances towards audiences are connected not only to instrumentalist approaches to journalism, but also to the readiness of students to conform to dominant practices. Bearing in mind that there is no causal relation between these qualities, these findings highlight what educators already know from experience: that sharpening students' awareness and directing their attention towards specific set of journalistic values, instead of others, can be related to the overall philosophy students develop in regard to the journalistic profession and the way they position themselves in the realm of journalism.

To conclude, current studies in media practices reveal a widespread uncertainty and skepticism as to redefining the role of journalism in accordance to the new landscape of public communication and forms of civic culture. In a radically changing media environment, where the augmentation of the potential publics and the ways of accessing information has created an unprecedented condition of pluralized and democratised news gathering and news-production, journalism education is a good starting point for rethinking news journalism's role in democracy and, more specifically, its express need for reorientation in the context of emerging, new forms of civic culture and democratic deliberation. The opening of the Newseum in Washington DC may well indicate that journalism as we knew it has become a museum piece. Many have rushed to assume the role of the proud curators of a magnificent tradition. But that's just yesterday's news...

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