

Preserving Journalism

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on the normative ideal that the function of news media is to support democratization, or—to put it more precisely—to guarantee freedom of speech, to ensure that different opinions are heard, and to act as a public watchdog against the abuse of power. As contemporary practices reveal, the media has many goals; at the same time, however, the media's actual informational contribution does not meet normative demands. This article looks into the issues of media systems convergence and journalism homogenization from three perspectives. First, it shows that, though demanding transparency from other institutions of society, journalism remains the most opaque: Media seldom discusses market-led changes in its own field (such as mergers and acquisitions) from a public-interest point of view. Second, it reveals that the distinction between journalism and other genres of public communication is gradually disappearing, and journalism is being used for other (promotional, political) purposes. Third, the article claims that a small media market cannot avoid concentration; hence, the question of diversity of journalistic content remains a very vulnerable issue. In a small market the national professional community is also rather small, thus the impact of one medium or one person on the public agenda may become very influential.

As concluded, this so-called “media marketization” process is nothing new. A common understanding in contemporary media studies is that convergence of media systems and homogenization of journalism is becoming a worldwide trend. Researchers have proposed that structural and organizational changes in the media systems (for example, an ongoing media concentration, news commercialization, growth of infotainment and overabundance of hybrid media) have taken place within the media of all countries with more or less similar results. In a small country, however, the process of media marketization creates a dual impression. On the one hand, the market-led model promoted in media regulation and existing policies in Lithuania and Estonia, as well as the emerging new possibilities and forms for funding of media products, result in diversity of media structure as well as content. On the other hand, in such a context, the audience needs new skills to be able to critically assess available information, make informed choices, and become interpreters of what is credible and valuable—in other words, to be media-literate. By posing a number of critical questions, this article suggests that the popularity and wide availability of media affords the opportunity to revisit ideas of journalism change and professionalization and reassess democratic media performance in a small market.

Introduction

Theorists agree that critical and transparent communication is essential for any modern state. To a great extent this role (of a watchdog or a fourth estate) has been delegated to journalism. But in these neoliberal times, media systems are dominated by private capital. Media convergence and homogenization of journalism is taking place all over the world, posing a threat to democratic communication. In our networked world, distinctions between journalism and other forms of communication (such as advertising, promotional and marketing communication, and news management) are disappearing, and the traditional idea of journalist as an autonomous gatekeeper is vanishing, thus challenging the function of meaningful agenda-setting and serving the public.

Still, in this rapidly changing situation, in spite of all the challenges that journalism is facing, professional journalistic culture may be able to withstand economic and political

pressures and to fulfill the role of “critical independent analyst.” Therefore, the chief argument of this article is that in a democracy it remains of crucial importance for journalists to (a) *define* and to (b) *preserve* journalistic discourse so that citizens can recognize certain characteristics of professional journalism and distinguish them from other texts. Thus the standards of a journalistic discourse are the preconditions for journalism professionalization.

For this goal—to answer the question of how to preserve autonomous journalism—a comparative discussion on the main threats to journalistic discourse (distinguishable from other public communication discourses like PR, advertising, and political news management) and possibilities to develop the national journalistic culture are presented.

In order to shed light on the challenges currently facing journalism, structural changes in the media of two Baltic states—Lithuania and Estonia—are assessed, and a few cases of changing journalistic discourses are examined. In this respect, the comparative perspective becomes decisive. The universal phenomena reported as taking place in media systems worldwide (news commercialization, infotainment, media instrumentalization, technological and generic shifts) constitute different matrices in different national settings. These matrices are related to political and economic preconditions. In Estonia, the commercial forces seem to be taking over in journalism, while in Lithuania the situation looks more diversified, with indicators of both economic and political media instrumentalization (Balčytienė 2006).

In this article, the degree of “media instrumentalization” means the extent to which journalism is penetrated by external actors and interests (political, economic, religious, or other). In the same way, the concept of “journalistic discourse” is used to refer to the specific information management machinery, based on processing methods and routines, formats and consumption of factual and non-fictional phenomena in the form of mediated messages in different media outlets (Harro 2001, 13). Our understanding of “journalistic culture” includes normative regulation, professional ideology, and conventions that determine what we expect from journalism (Balčytienė 2006).

1. Baltic News Market: Small, Concentrated, and Vulnerable

A common understanding in contemporary media studies is that convergence of media systems is becoming a worldwide trend (see, for example, Humphreys 1996, and Hallin and Mancini 2004). A gradual and ongoing process of commodification of news, rapid shifts towards mixed media and entertaining reporting, increasing professionalization in political communication towards news management, strategic communication and market-oriented politics, as well as many other processes which have affected public communication over the past few decades, have contributed to the fact that media systems in contemporary societies are becoming more and more similar. Some scholars have even gone further by warning that economic power is among the strongest factors contributing to media assimilation.

The news markets in Estonia and Lithuania are small, and media regulation is very liberal. This creates a dichotomy. On the one hand, liberal media regulation (no laws against media concentration or cross-ownership) opens new fields and forms for media development. On the other hand, liberal regulation and the virtual absence of state intervention in the matters of mass media encourage the proliferation of market-oriented logic. In addition, in both countries media accountability is weak (Harro-Loit and Balčytienė 2005).

The Estonian news market is highly concentrated. The mainstream news media is owned by two Scandinavian conglomerates (Schibsted/Eesti Meedia and Bonnier) and one Estonian multimedia conglomerate (Ekspress Group). Media ownership in Lithuania is more diverse: While two strong groups (Lietuvos Rytas and Respublika) dominate the print media market on a national level, the local media (both print and broadcast) is still managed by an abundance of small owners. Concentration has started to take place in the Internet media, albeit slowly: The

top leading online news portals Delfi.lt (also Delfi.ee) and Balsas.lt are maintained by companies in all kinds of business (catalog publishing, IT, and telecommunications), while other frequently visited news portals (Lrytas.lt, Lrt.lt, Alfa.lt) are attached to mainstream print or broadcast media. As reported in 2005, Lithuania had mostly nationally owned media, while Estonia was strongly oriented toward foreign ownership (Harro-Loit 2005). However by 2007 the situation changed in both countries towards more concentrated and much more mixed ownership forms in media business.¹

2. Conditions Inhibiting (or Favoring) Journalism Professionalization

In recent years Baltic journalism has faced strong pressures for change. The overall circulation of dailies has decreased, while the circulation of tabloids has multiplied. The number of news broadcasts has increased in both countries. All media companies (including those on the Internet) have faced economic challenges. The number of news outlets (the number of free publications, broadcasting time, online news portals, magazines) has increased much more than the resources available. Moreover, the costs of digitalization have been huge, and in this context, the public service mission of national broadcasting companies (LRT and ETV) has been questioned. Entertainment has become an essential part of the mainstream media.

Three factors in particular—ongoing media concentration, proliferation of hybrid media through commercialization of journalism, and an increase of source power through news management—have influenced journalistic culture, journalistic content, journalistic practices, and the values on which Lithuanian and Estonian journalism are based.

2.1 Media Watching over the Media

Within an ongoing discussion about rapid changes in media structures and the news market, the Baltic states are facing one particular dilemma. For small news markets (Lithuania has a population of 3.4 million and Estonia one of 1.4 million), it is important to find a balance between two essential elements. On the one hand, a few large and wealthy media firms could provide more, and more innovative, media products, and with better editorial content, than many highly competitive small suppliers with limited resources. On the other hand, a highly concentrated media ownership and business logic based on the economic management of news production and distribution poses a threat to pluralism by concentrating more power into the hands of just a few suppliers (Doyle 2002, 17).

Thus, in the rapidly changing media situation currently faced by these two Baltic states, we cannot avoid a public discussion of media concentration. It is crucial to assess how the media itself constructs journalistic culture and journalism discourse (for example, how the media reports about structural changes in its own field).

In different media cultures, when such issues as media commercialization and concentration are reported to a wider audience (from the perspective of media policy), it becomes crucial to evaluate how the mainstream media themselves present media mergers or other critical issues related to media performance to a wider audience: as purely commercial events, as infotainment, or as events with sociopolitical repercussions. Merger coverage in the domestic media can provide citizens with the means to judge whether media consolidation is advisable or dangerous. Alternately, it can simply “naturalize” these events (e.g., merging and power-concentrating) as strictly economic matters and thus irrelevant to the life of an ordinary citizen.

¹ Compared to a few years ago, the media in Lithuania and Estonia today is already more controlled by foreign multimedia groups (Schibsted from Norway with investments in newspaper, magazine, and free-daily publishing) and local industrialists (who often have political alliances).

According to Davidson (2006), who has assessed media merger reports in two different contexts, such as France and the United States, it appears that in different journalistic cultures media concentration is framed fairly similarly—mainly as economic matters. Findings from the Baltic states, too, confirm that media mergers, if they are discussed in public at all, are mainly reported from an economic perspective in newspapers’ or news portals’ business-news sections (thus not particularly targeting the average citizen²). Moreover, news sources cited in the reports are mainly business executives and managers. The coverage of the ownership change in Lithuania’s biggest regional daily *Kauno diena*, which had been owned by Norwegian Orkla Media since 1998, serves as a good example. Thirty-eight news reports (in both print and Internet media) were collected in the period between October 2006 and February 2007. All news reports about the withdrawal of Norwegian owners from the Lithuanian print media market were mainly framed as business events filled with facts about the company itself (only stressing that the newspaper is the strongest regional daily in Lithuania, providing its weekly circulation numbers, its budget, staff numbers, etc.) and removed from the realm of socio-political contention. In all reports, commercial frames and commercial sources (managers, experts) took up a majority of the coverage. Aside from traditional media, the online news of the same event (ownership change in *Kauno diena*) on Delfi.lt generated substantial reader interest, and around 500 reader comments on the issue of newspaper acquisition were collected and coded. One might claim that online reader comments have brought more scrutiny and acted as external watchdogs monitoring and questioning the case (e.g. what the change from foreign to Lithuania-based capital ownership means for the media climate in Lithuania) and accuracy of media reporting, that reader commentaries compensated for the lack of views and critical perspectives in journalistic reports. However, this kind of information can be classified only as claims and rumors. Critical analysis is lacking.

Examples from Estonia also suggest that changes in the media are not addressed by the media with the same level of attention as changes in other fields of society. There is a lack of attention both to the fact, for example, of ownership change, and adequate framing. Changes in the media field are reported as economic events (for example, “to create a strong national radio network”), stressing public interest on a national level (“public concerns such as problems of public transport or county governor assignments are commonly important everywhere, not just on a local level”), thus giving the impression of being a positive event for local inhabitants.

Indeed, mediated discourses from Lithuania and Estonia suggest that changes in the Baltic media are described only as events as happening inside the field. Business news reports focus on economic data (facts and figures that offer little background information for an average citizen) or media personalities involved in the matter. There may be different reasons for this, including lack of expert knowledge by journalists to cover and question financial events professionally (this signals a need for adequate training in business news reporting), the top-down influence from the management, media instrumentalization (media affiliation with business and/or political fields), professional ideology (“to protect the field from outsiders”), and many others.

Regardless of the reasons, lack of public knowledge and debate on this sort of change in the field and growing power may become problematic for democracy.

2.2 Exploiting Journalism

Scholarly debates are now focusing on the process of journalism *homogenization*. This process becomes evident in practices of journalistic genre mixing, more sensational and more

² Indeed there are a few notable exceptions. Recently, in Lithuania, an online project “Projektas Ž” (Project “J”; J—for journalism) was initiated by a media scholar from Vilnius University to discuss journalism and media performance, while in Estonia a national daily, *Eesti Päevaleht*, occasionally reviews media matters in its sections.

entertainment-oriented reporting, blurring boundaries between news and advertising. Mixed discourses (hybrid discourses of PR, advertisement and journalistic texts) proliferate in magazines, broadcast media, and online editions of newspapers. Radio as an outlet is changing and is used more for broadcasting music than news. The critical side of this practice is that the wide availability of hybrid discourses *legitimizes* the diminishing border between advertising (promotional text) and journalism.

Indeed, different newsrooms (in both conventional and Internet media) can (and do) have systems to separate journalism from advertising (for example, by separating the marketing department from the newsroom) and to filter the promotional material as it comes in. But, at the same time, these offices say very little about the fact that there are economic reasons and mechanisms behind the scenes that work against the border's existence. Also, there are different ideologies and organizational policies among news organizations towards what should be considered promotional material, whether it should be avoided, tolerated, or even looked at.

In their study, Harro-Loit and Saks (2007) argue that the diversity of the existing attitudes within the media market towards the definition and maintenance of the above-mentioned border indicates that "the physiology of the border is a sophisticated mixture of economic and ideological factors." To put it more precisely, in very small media markets, where for some media survival on the market means overlooking the difference between paid-for and independent information, the discussion should not be reduced to a matter of ethical conduct. The magazine, broadcast, and online media, for example, may find it beneficial to legitimize the deletion of the border to avoid confusing their audience (Harro-Loit and Saks 2007).

This raises the critical question as to whether such a wide range of attitudes works to protect the journalistic integrity that is needed for a democratic society or instead helps to further the commercialization of the media and the total diminution of the border.

What is worrying is that in both Baltic states the systems of media accountability and self-regulation are weak—the control mechanisms of legislation, the Code of Ethics, and the concept of good journalistic practice are either ignored or misused. The border that separates journalism from advertising is, as a result, losing its definition and purpose. In addition, for the audience, distinguishing the border becomes especially complex as the independent journalistic material and promotional writing is mixed across outlets, formats, and publications.

The biggest problem, however, is that the journalistic community does not see this diminishing border between journalism and advertising as unethical. Baerug (2005) provides evidence on this issue from a comparative study. He studied the answers of TV journalists from the three Baltic states and Norway working for national, regional, and local TV stations concerning whether they would accept payment for inviting political figures on their programs. This study and the current events show that this practice is quite widespread in the Baltic-Scandinavian context. For example, in March 2007, before the parliamentary elections in Estonia, the commercial channel TV3 aired a political debate program where two prominent party leaders discussed their platforms. Newspapers covered the event, but it was only mentioned in passing that the two political parties paid for their time on TV3. The audience was not otherwise informed that the program was a paid-for (thus not conventional) TV debate. Another research study from Estonia gives evidence that, as a matter of fact, the demands the media (especially TV channels) receive from advertisers are much bigger than TV stations, magazines, and online media can offer. As a result, "all the magazines are filled with hidden advertising [...] Some do not even try to create journalistic content any more. For example, in *Ärielu* [Business Life], all the texts are seemingly journalistic, but everyone knows these are paid texts" (Lepp 2005, 51–53).

Baerug (2005) concludes that, no matter what national settings journalists work in, they see the need for various means to control this practice. These means range from stricter

supervision (for example, court cases for breaking the law against hidden advertising: According to journalists from the Baltic states, since there has been no court trial over the issue of hidden advertising, nobody is afraid of placing hidden advertising on TV), legalizing the practice,³ having thorough public discussion, and better education of journalists.

Indeed, the commercialization of the media has created new challenges for journalists. It has also exacerbated potential weaknesses in the profession such as weak professional values and norms, absence of media accountability. Thus media professionals can be considered an indirect link to the current situation.

The convergence of problems seems to confirm a kind of homogenization of journalistic cultures, extending beyond divergent institutional constraints (state participation, for example, is stricter in Norway than in the Baltic states) and market constraints (there seem to be differences emerging between small news markets, such as Norway, and very small news markets, such as the three Baltic states) within media systems.

The authors of this article believe that the media organizations that operate in small media markets are especially vulnerable to the intervention of promotional and advertising materials as the media organizations are becoming eager to collect all the advertising money available.

The counterbalance to economic pressure could be the ideology of professional independence. However, in societies undergoing transformation, the journalistic community and the professional culture seems too weak to resist such pressure.

Furthermore, the media concentration and a very small job market make the ideology of professional independence extremely vulnerable. Thus the journalists, instead of being loyal primarily to their professional ideals, become more loyal to the ideology of their employer. As a result, journalism as a cultural practice is subordinated to the economic rationale of marketing. Ongoing secularization⁴ and commercialization dictates the nature of journalism and prescribes limits of public interest. Thus the locus of news is clearly seeking a more immediate connection to the everyday life of individuals.

2.3 Growing Power of (News) Sources

Not only are market pressures and the hypercommercialization of journalism responsible for the quality shifts in journalistic discourse, but the quality of interaction between journalists and their sources has also changed substantially. This trend is well observed in political communication culture. On the international scale, some scholars assess these changes in the light of general professionalization of political communication (Negrine and Lilleker 2002). Indeed, there is a sense of a “permanent campaign” happening in political communication, and such things as campaign professionalization, political marketing, and source professionalization are observed (Norris 2000). The question that Negrine and Lilleker (2002) raise is related to two things: “professionalization” as related to the growth of specialized knowledge on political issue management and techniques around new technologies and media, or “professionalization” as a real shift in the communication of politics in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

³ In Lithuania, requirements for political advertising and the procedure for announcing and designating it in the media are established by the Law on Funding of Political Parties and Political Campaigns and Control over the Funding (enacted in 2004).

⁴ Generally, secularization is understood as decline of a political order based on collective political actors and identities (such as religion, political parties or trade unions), and their replacement by a much more fragmented and individualised society. For example, in a secular society the locus of news pulls away from politics and seeks a more immediate connection to the everyday life of individuals.

For our discussion on changes in journalistic discourse in the Baltic states, the former aspect—the “professionalization” of political (or economic) sources in terms of becoming effective media agenda controllers—is of particular importance. For the news media it becomes a tempting challenge to exploit ready-made information offered free of charge. This has an impact on structural changes in the media organization as well. Many conventional media have become content-production companies instead of news media: they publish newspapers, books, online news portals, and catalogues, and also organize conferences. In short, they simply re-package information into different forms, formats, or outlets.

Research studies also show that for political journalists nowadays, the biggest challenge remains the ability to avoid the less relevant coverage of political affairs, to get beyond the spin and controlled access, to rely on one’s own investigation, to be able to sort out the truth, to be able to report the facts behind the scenes of political decision-making, and to be able to withstand and to overcome political manipulation of the press. In other words, in view of the increasing ability of political elites to control the agenda, the core challenge is to preserve the autonomy of journalists and to withstand pressures from political (or economic) sources. Another problematic question that journalists face is how to preserve the trust of the public while getting behind closed doors and using anonymous sources.

Communication drawbacks at the European level also demonstrate the universality of these problems, i.e. of changes in relationship between journalists and their (political) news sources. Research data from the project “AIM—Adequate Information Management in Europe” on a comparative scale (across 11 countries in Europe) demonstrates that, while working in Brussels, foreign correspondents face numerous challenges. Although there is no question about the *quantity* of information that reaches journalists through numerous sources and outlets, the *quality* of information remains a very problematic issue for all journalists—both from old and new EU member states (AIM research consortium 2007a and 2007b). Indeed, while having facts and data (from press releases, Midday Briefings at the European Commission, the Internet web sites), journalists do not have an overview, i.e. they lack information on prioritized issues under political discussion. In short, they lack a broader understanding on what is going on the political level of the EU. The AIM project concludes that, in addition to general change in political communication cultures due to source professionalization and the arrival of image-oriented politics, there is a serious structural communication problem at the EU level: There is a lack of transparency, and the information communicated is very complex. At the moment, the European Commission does not assume the role of a clear strategic player; instead it prefers to be seen as neutral (following a one-voice policy), not involved in polemics and avoiding national views and debates. Journalists, in contrast, are looking for conflicting views and details of political decision-making processes. Journalists favor unsolicited and unhampered access to all available material and want to rely on their own interpretations. Thus the general role of journalist as a watchdog of politics and of political institutions is institutionally hampered within the European context. On the EU level, it appears that a central problem of European information is connected to the extent and will of the EU institutions to accept political controversies as a matter of course and, therefore, a matter of public discourse. The contribution of journalism in enhancing transparency and openness could be improved considerably if journalists would gain access to better insight into the very mechanisms and procedures of decision-making, i.e. the background information.

To conclude, it is not easy for journalists to cope with these many challenges since, with the professionalization of sources, they are increasingly denied direct access to important issues. Compared to earlier years, this relationship is said to become more distant. Opportunities for confidential off-the-record talks are lacking, and access to politicians is more controlled.

2.4 Synthesis

Having said all this, the tendencies within changes in journalistic discourse signal *inadequate journalism*, or, as some call it, hypercommercialized or exploited journalism. Indeed, hybrid media is cheaper to produce than good journalism. For the mainstream media operating under a strong commercial impetus, this works well, because hybrid news is cheaper to produce; it also helps to grab audience attention and deliver these audiences to advertisers, thus it fits media organizational goals. In addition, audiences are shrinking for all kinds of journalism—TV programs, newspapers, and online media. The media managers are facing challenges of finding and addressing these audiences.

The causes of hybrid media are indeed quite plain. The quality of journalism suffers due to bottom-line pressures. As the expenses for serious coverage are extremely high, some media cannot and will not pay for them. Journalists gradually anticipate more mixed journalism that is treated as a commodity, and which in turn furthers the trend toward cheaper media production, in contrast to in-depth and investigative reporting by professional journalists (Plasser 2005). Scott (2006), also in the same direction, argues that in favor of expanding profit margins, the commercial press has gradually abandoned the public service mission of journalism. Large corporations have colonized both offline and online media. There is a fundamental shift of newsworthiness that is based upon the judgment of serving the public absolutely on the one hand, and, on the other, serving the public as long as it is profitable and promises to become more profitable. This is how the market (but also the Internet—the so-called 24/7 logic) operates. At the same time, this signals a qualitative shift in journalism.

3. What can be done?

It seems that in an open, frenetic, and overcrowded media environment, the news organizations are losing their role as gatekeepers and agenda-setters. Old responses to the question of who is a journalist based primarily on roles associated with the process of gathering and disseminating information no longer apply. Instead, journalists in such an environment become “interpreters of what is both credible and valuable—with the notion of independence keeping those interpretations from becoming compromised by partisan loyalties” (Singer 2006, 12). On the assumption that independent and professional journalistic discourse is worth preserving (especially in the era of homogenization of media content, commercialization, and the trend towards hybrid discourses), one should ask about the possible means to counterbalance the disappearance of journalism.

So the question is: What must be done and by whom (and how, if possible) to preserve the journalistic discourse in the midst of all the changes that endanger it (media convergence and concentration, the increasing power of political and economic news sources, the professionalization of political communication)?

The fact that the members of the EJTA, the European Journalism Training Association (journalism schools and media, communications or journalism departments at various universities) accepted the standards of journalism education in summer 2006 (Tartu declaration⁵) is symptomatic of the notion that liberal and only market-oriented vocational training might not

⁵ The Tartu Declaration – a document of professional journalistic principles – was accepted at the Annual General Meeting of European Journalism Training Association (EJTA) in 2006 in Tartu, Estonia, puts a strong stress on journalistic training and education from the normative idea that journalists should *serve* the public by providing a critical insight into political, economic, socio-cultural conditions, by strengthening democracy at all levels, by stimulating their own professional autonomy and accountability. Consequently, journalism education should put a very strong emphasis on the training of certain professional competences such as critical reflection, analysis, assessment as well as organization of professional journalistic work. More information can be found online: <http://www.ejta.eu/index.php/website/projects>.

be sufficient to counterbalance the economic pressure. For example, the first competence goal (“the competence to reflect on the societal role of and developments within journalism”) of the Tartu declaration refers to the graduate’s ability to have insight in the role and influence of journalism in modern society, to have an understanding of the values that underlie your professional choices and so forth. .

Thus in this changing situation, academic journalism studies and journalism education could be one counterbalancing factor. Academic studies could provide the analytic methods and vocabulary necessary for the *deconstruction* of processes that influence the context of journalistic performance. For example such concepts as “intertextuality,” “promotional writing,” and “discourse analysis” make the phenomena of hybrid discourses more apparent. In the same way, “political economy” provides a frame for analysis of media policy (the public should be able to understand more about the economic background of news production).

In spite of emerging possibilities, journalistic training and academic media research in the Baltic states face some serious challenges. In both countries, higher education is being rearranged into the two-level (B.A. and M.A.) model. This means that in both countries journalism training is still in the process of dismantling old programs into undergraduate and post-graduate degrees.⁶ Another problem is related to higher education reform: the ranking system of academic publications, favoring only the most renowned international publications, does not encourage scholars to publish in their national (Lithuanian or Estonian) languages. This is one reason why academics have little motivation to cultivate the culture of adequate media critique. As a result, many critical concepts for media analysis are not popularized and remain understandable only in the context of academic scholarship. In addition, this knowledge is not accessible to other interested parties, namely schoolteachers (who could use popular texts in media literacy classes) or media policy makers. And the third problem is related to the lack of critical mass of media scholars—both countries have only a limited number of journalism professors.⁷

In short, journalistic education must provide critical reflection on the professional ideology and competences necessary for a critical analyst in a rapidly changing media environment. In addition, for both parties—audiences and the policy makers—modern journalism (which is vulnerable and rapidly changing) needs to be deconstructed by critical research.

Conclusion

Rapid restructuring within the media industry, professionalization of political communication, and the impact of new technologies (which was not addressed here) affect journalistic discourse in three ways in particular.

First, conventional genres belonging to journalism are being used for other—promotional and political—purposes. This has gradually become a legitimate practice among media professionals.

Second, though demanding transparency from other institutions of society, journalism remains the most opaque. Media seldom discusses media matters (changes in the field such as

⁶ One crucial problem with journalism training is that the number of students at MA levels is relatively low. In addition, many of the students have full-time jobs before they graduate from university. Thus, although MA programs fit the training standards supported by EJTA (containing courses on self-reflection, critical discourse analysis, and media internships), this professional and academic knowledge is not really disseminated among media professionals. In short, there is a gap between the available knowledge at academia and the knowledge that is actually spread among professional journalists.

⁷ This problem is even more obvious in Lithuania.

media convergence, mergers, and acquisitions) from a public-interest point of view. This puts public interest under attack.

Third, the small media market cannot avoid concentration; hence, the question of diversity of journalistic content remains a vulnerable issue. In a small market the national professional community is also rather small. Thus the impact of one medium or one person on the public agenda may become very influential.

Professional journalism's problems are both new (addressing structural changes in the national media systems, initiating public discussions, dealing with commercialization and image-oriented politics) and old (performing the role of a watchdog). The journalistic culture of Lithuania and Estonia is influenced by the Liberal media model. But weaker historical journalistic traditions and weaker self-regulation (lack of respect and social responsibility) has caused significant divergences from British or Nordic examples. Journalistic culture in the Baltics today is characterized by secularization, competition, and consumerism.

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