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(eds.)

Journalism that Matters

Views from Central and Eastern Europe



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Editors' introduction

Media around the world are nowadays being challenged by social change, the rise of digital ecosystems and practices enabling media users to actively contribute to the process of media-making. The 'blurring' border between producers and consumers, technological developments, emerging economic models, as well as the rise of creative publics, generate both opportunities and challenges for the development of journalism in the fast-changing information society. All of this has an impact on journalism culture, which is complex, diverse and might be treated as a multi-layered analytical prism.

Changes in journalism culture in different national environments have been studied for years. The notion of journalism culture has been analysed by using different perspectives, namely as media ethics, accountability, changes in the structure of profession, generational shifts, relations with politics, public, civil society, and so on. Overall, all of this has become the subject of conferences, such as "Matters of Journalism: Understanding Professional Challenges and Dilemmas" organized by the Polish Communication Association and University of Gdańsk in 2012, "The Future of Journalism in an Age of Digital Media and Economic Uncertainty" organized by the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies in 2013 and – more recently – the meeting of Journalism Studies Section at ECREA in Thessaloniki, entitled "Journalism in Transition: Crisis or Opportunity?" Moreover, journalism cultures have become the focus of several international research projects, just to mention a few – "Global Journalist in the 21st Century," "Worlds of Journalism Study," and "Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe (MediaAcT)." A large number of comparative initiatives underlined the characteristics and features of journalism and included cases from Central and Eastern Europe, which have gone through a lengthy process of free media and journalism development and share some interesting features in relation to challenges faced by contemporary journalism today.

In this collection, we take a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to analyse the journalism cultures in selected Central and Eastern European (CEE)¹ countries. The analysis is being conducted with a reference to general features and characteristics of journalism in Central and Eastern Europe with national case studies from Poland, Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia, the Russian Federation and Estonia in the ensuing chapters. The salient questions we address are: What are the specific features of journalism cultures in the Central and Eastern Europe?

1 Henceforth, throughout the chapters of this book, CEE refers to 'Central and Eastern European.'

Which external and internal factors have the biggest influence on the development of journalism cultures? What are the differences between the models of journalism developed in Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe? How might these differences be explained?

All the chapters presented here address changes in CEE media and journalism by combining at least two wide-ranging perspectives – historical and cultural. By observing the particularities of contextual circumstances and cultural variations across the Central and Eastern Europe, the chapters also question whether an acceptable combination of those circumstances could be uncovered to assist CEE media to perform its statutory (democratic) functions. As examined and argued by various authors in this volume, adequate economic market conditions are critically important for the media to safeguard its autonomy and professionalism. Nonetheless, other (and predominantly cultural) factors are indispensable to ascertain and support the CEE media in the long journey to democratization. Hence, all texts presented here critically examine whether some of the identified developments and trends in CEE journalism, such as its shifting roles and functions, and the arising importance of semi-alternative communications in the internet space could be considered as pioneering practices and also as paradigms witnessed in other countries around the world.

Although most of the chapters were written in 2013, queries and affairs they are pointing to and warnings they address suggest that for Central and Eastern Europe the 21st century is no less challenging and complex than the decades of the Cold War were. The region and its public communications once again call to be symbolically described as epicenter of informational and geo-political affairs facing informational maneuverings and provocations, disinformation and propaganda. One needs to realize: for the post-war Central and Eastern Europe this is indeed the 'moment of truth,' a litmus test case in its democratic emancipation.

We expect that this book will interest media scholars and practitioners, but also students of media and communications in the media or in business studies in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond. Above all we believe that the interdisciplinary research presented in the collection will result in the emergence of new ideas and concepts contributing to the understanding of journalism culture in the changing mediascapes.

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