

CHALLENGES FOR PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

On tripartite identity of the Baltic media and its impact on media performance

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This article applies comparative analysis framework and demonstrates that media in the Baltic States offers rich news environment with diverse choices. As practice reveals, the three countries were also able (with more or less success) to institutionalize media self-regulation systems. In spite of these transformations towards democratic media, this article discloses that due to certain drawbacks (lack of internal media freedom and labile professional ideals) media performance does not always adequately serve the requirements of democracy. Very often media becomes an instrument to reach other (political or business) aspirations. In addition, the article focuses on certain aspects of media culture in the countries of the same geographic region (Baltic and Nordic countries) and identifies unique national and "imported" characteristics in the Baltic media systems and assesses their impact on media performance. Finally, it proposes that media cultures in the Baltic States represent mixed models with mainstream commercial and public service media each functioning with their own logic and professional journalistic norms.

Keywords: *Baltic media, Nordic media, media culture, small market, pluralism, liberalization, commercialization, professionalization*

Foreword: on comparative approaches to studying media cultures

Generally speaking, the definition of media culture covers journalistic practices, professional standards and ethical considerations as determined by political, economic, social, historical, legal, cultural, linguistic and technological parameters. Numerous research studies demonstrate the connections between the features of journalism cultures and broader contextual frameworks of media systems. For example, in their

seminal book "Thee Models of Media and Politics", Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini disclose striking features (press-politics relationships or different degrees of state intervention into media systems) that occur across many media systems worldwide but with a different character (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

The comparative media research perspective is particularly interesting for several reasons. Contemporary media systems are rapidly changing with many challenges affecting national journalism cultures and

culminating with more or less similar results such as changes in news production routines, commercialization of content and marketization of politics. Accordingly, a number of important questions arise: How global developments towards increased commercialization and market-oriented politics are reflected in small countries media? How does the size and wealth of the market affect media diversity and pluralism? Another aspect of comparative media studies deals with variations across the media systems of a similar kind, i.e. having comparable parameters (such as the size of the news market or the most recent media development, etc.). The questions asked, therefore, concern: What is the impact of foreign ownership on the media development in countries of young democracy? Do foreign models of media self-regulation imported into the countries of young democracy help local media to achieve consolidation and professionalism?

As one can notice, it is very difficult to comprehend the characteristics of media performance and, consequently, of media functions only from inside. Journalism quality – or to put it more precise, norms and professional routines as well as procedural aspects of news manufacturing, media functions and roles, etc. – can only be meaningfully described and analyzed in comparison to similar research objects. In short, the logic of comparative media research rests on the idea that a purely national focus is too limiting. Thus, by performing a comparative analysis, this article also aims at another goal. As popularly conceived, the function of the news media is to support democratization, namely to provide information, to ensure that different opinions and voices are

heard and to act as watchdog. By discussing Baltic media developments according to a normative ideal of democratization, this article also seeks to disclose the circumstances under which liberal regulation leads to media independence, editorial autonomy and professionalization of journalism and when and why it fails to achieve these functions.

Baltic media in transition: from historical changes to the challenges of liberal market

In the end of the 20th century the Baltic countries have experienced a number of significant challenges such as political and economic, to name a few. The political change of the 1990s complemented with social and cultural as well as technological challenges has crucially affected all spheres of life, including the institution of the media. Immediately after the political breakthrough, the news market has diversified by splitting along different political lines (party newspapers were established). However, in the mid 1990s, the last party newspaper (a conservative daily *Lietuvos aidas*) vanished in Lithuania – signs of party affiliation disappeared from all dailies and all newspapers became “free and independent”. In the broadcasting sector, rapid diversification also took place: in Lithuania, commercial broadcasting was introduced in 1993 (with TELE3 which is TV3 now owned by the Modern Times Group from Sweden) and till present, a small media market has a wide range of TV and radio stations in both public service and commercial sectors. However, technological diffusion followed by segmentation of

media channels and audiences as well as other global tendencies have made the most visible impact on the changes in the Baltic media structures as well as news production and media use routines and habits.

If compared to the changes and challenges taking place in the media systems in the same geographic region, a clear difference between the Nordic and Baltic countries is that the latter were faster to apply market-led reforms. In the Baltic countries, the trend of (hyper)commercialization has occurred with a much faster speed, though similar media developments are taking place in the Nordic countries now (party-press relationship is gradually losing its importance in print media and rapid diffusion of free dailies has become real) (Hoyer, 2005; Nord, 2006). At the same time, in spite of certain similarities, clear differences persist in media performance in the countries around the Baltic Sea.

The three Baltic States have experienced serious drawbacks in the histories of independent journalism development. For example, the first newspapers in their national languages were published significantly later than in many other European languages. The first periodical publication in the national language, *Nusidavimai Dievo karalystėje*, was printed in Lithuania Minor in 1823. It appeared much later than, for instance, the Estonian *Luhhike Oppetus* (1776), the Latvian *Latviesu Arste* (1768), or the Polish *Merkuriusz Polski* (1661). In Lithuania, a serious drawback in print and publishing culture development was a long and intensive Russification period which started in the late 18th and 19th centuries when following the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth in 1795, Lithu-

ania and Poland were incorporated into the Tsarist Russia. After a massive national revolt in 1863 all publications in the Lithuanian language were banned.¹ In the year 1904, the ban was lifted and a new phase of the development of the literary press began. Even in times of the First Republic, 1918–1940 (not speaking about the five decades of the Soviet rule and media functions in 1940/45–1990), there were only few periods when censorship was seized (two press laws were accepted: the first in 1919 and the second in 1936).

The Soviet rule and the five decades of the second half of the 20th century have yet made another impact on the media cultures in the Baltic States. The Soviet state was keen on having control over the content and distribution of public information. In fact, the content of the news was positive, but lacked news value. News about the achievements and victories of the working class dominated in the newspapers: the media did not aim at informing, but at confirming that the situation was favourable and developed as planned in the socialist countries. The media was strictly supervised, regulated and controlled by the Communist Party and its apparatus. Control over the public did not include only censorship of the press and electronic media. All kind of information – books, film, theatre and cinema performances, exhibitions, and advertising – was subject to censorship. Yet in this highly complex situation, a specific

¹ Here it needs to be mentioned that, in spite of prohibitions, the cultural life continued, albeit with certain costs: the Lithuanians resisted the tsarist government's program and produced *kontrafakcija*, which contained imprints misrepresenting date and place of publication; eventually they engaged in massive smuggling operations of Lithuanian books published abroad, mainly in the territory of East Prussia.

substitute for the political public sphere gradually emerged, namely the cultural sphere. It may be hypothesized that because of different factors (a relative cultural negligence and linguistic distinctiveness), literature and literary genres in journalism helped to develop a style of allegoric tales, metaphors and symbols that told an alternative story. Thus, a national morale could be bolstered (Tomas, 2001; Vihalemm et al., 1997). During the political breakthrough years of 1990s the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian societies were active and mobilized. However, civic engagement and public activity of that time was characterized by public participation and increased interest in societal affairs, but also by mass euphoria, low political pluralism, low tolerance and low personal responsibility (Senn, 1997; Vihalemm et al., 1997).

In 1990s, the three Baltic States (so-called former planned economies) stepped onto the 'laissez faire' path. Statutory media regulation was considered politically unacceptable and the model of a free market was highly appreciated. Many factors came into play here, for example the historical past (memories about the Soviet period and strict censorship), dramatic changes in the process of transition from planned to market economy, to mention but a few. In the new century (following the two decades after the fall of the communist regimes in East Central Europe), the Baltic journalism is facing new pressures. Different players are involved in media production, distribution and consumption; technological changes, too, translate into variety of transformations affecting audience segmentation and diversification. Scholars (not only in the Baltic States) are now discussing about the

needs to preserve professional journalism as media mainly produce mixed content (by concentrating on sensational and entertainment oriented reporting), mixed discourses proliferate in magazines, broadcast media and online, and the boundaries between news and advertising blur. Therefore, policy proposals are suggested ranging from formalization of professional training (emphasizing journalistic and editorial autonomy, critical thinking and reflection skills) to media literacy education in schools (Balčytienė, 2008; Harro-Loit and Ugur, in this volume).

New aspects in media pluralism and news media availability debate: a small country approach

In the debate on media democratic performance, certain concerns about media diversity and pluralism seem to be of particular importance. As one can notice, some of these arise from a broader debate on media culture and deal, for example, with media structural conditions such as diversity of media supply and news media availability for citizens. Consequently, according to this feature, media freedom and thus its democratic performance is better guaranteed if the relevant news media is available to all its citizens and is widely used by citizens. On the one hand, this structural feature refers to the country and its media landscape. On the other hand, it also deals with habits and traditions to consume media. It is hypothesized that the more news media is used, the more democratic freedom and the higher is the potential that democracy is promoted. Other concerns deal with diversity of opinions in media as well as,

in more general terms, media's ability to act as a public watchdog. Indeed, basic conditions to exercise the watchdog role are sufficient resources for the media organizations: only rich media can subscribe to more different news agencies, employ more reporters, invest into professional training of journalists and carry on investigative journalism projects. It is truism that larger and wealthier markets can afford greater diversity of output than smaller markets. Therefore, for smaller markets, a particular concern is the availability of resources (both financial and human) to support the production of original content (rich local news, investigative and analytical journalism) by domestic media groups as opposed to imported production. Research studies show that shortage of funds causes a decline in (expensive) foreign news coverage and foreign news quality in a small market. For example, in the Baltic States, only few media companies (in most cases only the public service broadcasters) thoroughly invest in the European Union news reporting (AIM Research Consortium, 2007).

As one can observe, news environment in each of the three Baltic countries is very rich (see Table 1). From the empirical point of view, neither structural nor content diversity is indeed a big problem: news media is widely present and can be accessed at a low cost. For example, Lithuania is in general an ethnically homogenous country; at the same time, it offers diverse alternative programs for national minorities – in 2007, out of the total number of 328 newspapers 25 were published in foreign languages. In addition, a great variety of local and regional newspapers may be noticed. There is a tendency that more newspapers are available in

larger regions, even though it is not a rule. Despite the distinguishing features between quality and tabloid press, the majority of the Lithuanian national dailies follow the middle road, i.e. serious things intertwine with popular reports on newspaper pages. It is also customary that dailies are published in a smaller, i.e. compact (tabloid) format (although a smaller format does not necessarily indicate that a newspaper is overtly sensational).

At the same time, a mass press market, usually described as having considerable amount of subscriptions and reaching a considerable number of readers on a daily basis, is a feature not easily described in the Baltic States. In all countries globally the decline of readership has been going on for quite some time (few decades), and a similar development is also observed here (although the tabloids have managed to keep their circulations). As a matter of fact, large-scale mass-circulation press has emerged only recently (in all three countries, a commercial press market has existed already in early 1920s, but only in the breakthrough years the daily circulations have reached numbers of a “mass” category, i.e. 500.000 circulation of some national dailies in Lithuania and 300.000 in Latvia). Generally speaking, the Baltic countries have moved into secularized consumer societies with de-regulated commercial markets without significant periods of adjustment, and shortage of partisan views (even on opinion pages of national dailies) understood in more traditional ways is a direct outcome of the historical and economic development.

The broadcast sector in the Baltic States was not associated with strong public ser-

Table 1. Basic facts about the Baltic countries and their media

Indicators	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Area (km ²)	45.226	64.589	65.301
EU and NATO	2004	2004	2004
Population and major linguistic groups (mil., 2007)	1.34 68.6% Estonians, 25.7% Russians, 3.3% Ukrainians and Belorussians	2.27 59% Latvians, 28% Russians, 4% Belorussians, 2% Poles, 1% Lithuanians, 5% other	3.38 84.6% Lithuanians, 6.3% Poles, 5.1% Russians, 1.1% Belorussians, 2.9% other language groups
Reading culture (first dailies in the national languages, newspaper reach according to WAN, 2006)	<i>Luhhike Oppetus</i> (1776) 68,5%	<i>Latviesu Arste</i> (1768) 64,7%	<i>Nusidavimai Dievo karalystėje</i> (printed in Lithuania Minor, 1823) 56%
Media regulation climate	Liberal	Liberal	Liberal
Total number of newspapers, number of dailies (WAN)	143 (2006) No. of dailies: 16	130 (2006) No. of dailies: 22	328 (2007) No. of dailies: 22
Major dailies, their average circulation numbers (000): data publicly provided by newspapers (2007)	<i>Postimees</i> (mainstream), 65–69 <i>SL Õhtuleht</i> (tabloid), 63–65 <i>Eesti Päevaleht</i> (mainstream), 35–39 <i>Aripäev</i> (business daily), 22–26 <i>Postimees</i> in Russian, 15–20	<i>Diena</i> (quality/mainstream), 33–52 (weekend edition) <i>Latvijas Avīze</i> (quality/mainstream), 45–48 <i>Vesti Sevodņa</i> (mainstream), 23–29 <i>Vakara Zinas</i> (tabloid), 12 <i>Vesti Segodna</i> (in Russian, mainstream), 39	<i>Vakaro žinios</i> (tabloid), 130 <i>Lietuvos rytas</i> (mainstream), 50–130 (weekend edition) <i>Respublika</i> (tabloid) <i>Kauno diena</i> (regional), 40 <i>L.T.</i> (tabloid) <i>Lietuvos žinios</i> (mainstream), 20 <i>Verslo žinios</i> (business daily), 10
Number of TV broadcasters	4 (3 national, 1 local)	28 (4 national)	31 (4 national, 1 regional, 27 local)
Number of radio broadcasters	32 (4 national, 16 regional, 12 local)	41	48 (10 national, 6 regional, 35 local)
Major Internet news portals and their types	<i>Delfi.ee</i> (online-only news portal) <i>Postimees.ee</i> (news portal of <i>Postimees</i>) <i>Sloleht.ee</i> (news portal of <i>SL Õhtuleht</i>) <i>Epl.ee</i> (news portal of <i>Eesti Päevaleht</i>) <i>Etv.ee</i> (news portal of ETV)	<i>Delfi.lv</i> (online-only news portal) <i>TVnet</i> (online-only news portal) <i>Apollo.lv</i> (online-only news portal) <i>Politika.lv</i> (specialized news and analysis online-only news portal) <i>Dialogi.lv</i> (specialized news and analysis online-only news portal)	<i>Delfi.lt</i> (online-only news portal) <i>Lrytas.lt</i> (news portal of <i>Lietuvos rytas</i>) <i>Alfa.lt</i> (online-only news portal) <i>Vz.lt</i> (news portal of <i>Verslo žinios</i>) <i>Bernardinai.lt</i> (online-only specialized news portal) <i>Lrt.lt</i> (news portal of LRT)
Internet penetration (2007)	69%	56%	53%
Free media (free dailies)	<i>Linnaleht</i>	<i>5 min</i> (in Riga and metro area, in Latvian and Russian) <i>Rītdiena</i>	<i>15 min</i> (in major cities: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda) <i>Miesto žinios</i> (in Vilnius)
Major media groups and ownership types	Eesti Meedia (owned by Schibsted, cross-media) Ekspress Grupp (print media) Bonnier Business Press (print media) Ühinenud ajakirjad (print media, Finnish owners) Moles (print media) Modern Times Group (MTG) (broadcast media) Metromedia International (radio) Sky Media (radio)	AS Diena (Bonnier Media, print media) Santa (magazines) Lilit (magazines) Petits (print media) MTG (broadcasting) News Corp Europe (broadcast media)	Lietuvos rytas (cross-media) Achemos grupė (cross-media) Respublikos leidiniai (print media) Žurnalų leidybos grupė (Schibsted, magazines) Verslo žinios (Bonnier Media, print media) Modern Times Group (MTG) (broadcast media) Diena Media News (previously owned by Orkla Media, print media) MG Baltic (cross-media) M-1 (radio)

vice broadcasting for quite some time. In early 1990s, state ownership, severe regulation and funding of the national television were associated with direct impact of the state on media content while commercial broadcasting was considered to be free and liberal – such a situation was very comfortable for commercial stations. However, in all three countries, the public service media is gradually gaining its audience back, although still searching for adequate models of finance.

The Internet has emerged with new proposals of expanding individuals' access to news media, opening new channels and offering more choices in the Baltic informational sphere. The number of voices has indeed increased online: online readers in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are actively commenting, submitting user-generated content or blogging online. While the Internet media may indeed have a democratizing function in small countries, there are certain costs associated with these advancements such as quality of online content and the development by news organizations of certain policies to deal with the flaws in online commenting.

Briefly, in the Baltic States the news media is relatively easy to access. It is also not expensive: all news portals offer free content, there are no taxes to pay for the public service media (TV and radio). Newspapers are facing serious competition, dropping numbers of readers, different subscription offers, and free dailies that are available in the biggest cities. In spite of these tendencies, age, education and income are still considered to be major factors affecting news media usage patterns: younger, better educated audiences show preferences

in Internet media consumption, while no clear age group distribution is noticed in TV news access. To conclude, in the Baltic States, the media transformation process can be characterized by a mixture of old and new media structures and by traditional media features co-existing with completely new media formats.

Yet it needs to be mentioned that small news environments are facing dramatic challenges. In small news environment (especially in Lithuania and Latvia, where regional media concentration process is still going on), survival on the market means two things for some media – either getting closely integrated into political or business field, or to be integrated into a larger chain of media. In all Baltic countries another tendency is observed: by seeking to remain on the market many local media are overlooking the difference between paid and independently produced information. Indeed, local news is the most expensive to produce; therefore, having limited budgets journalists are “forced” to produce hybrid media by mixing journalism, promotional writing and advertising. One particular dilemma that needs to be addressed here deals with the question whether media concentration – an issue widely debated and criticized by media scholars – is indeed a threat. One can claim that few but large and wealthy media firms could provide more and more innovative media products, with better editorial content and with more journalistic autonomy than many highly competitive small local media suppliers with only limited resources. At the same time, however, a highly concentrated media ownership poses a threat to pluralism by concentrating more power into the hands of just a few suppliers.

Power, pressures and influences in the media field²

Formally speaking, media regulation and adequate wording is in place in the Baltic States; in reality, however, certain drawbacks exist. For example, the majority of journalists in Lithuania say that they are independent in choosing their topics and feel no pressure from the media owners. At the same time, however, they would not in most cases produce a negative report on the owners. Another common practice is that some chief editors are also the directors of their media organization in Lithuania. Although there are not yet any proven grounds for concern, this raises questions regarding the editorial independence. For example, in the report by Transparency International Lithuania, a case is mentioned when a list of the main advertisers was hanging on the notice board in the newsroom of one national TV channel, meaning that no negative material should be announced about them. Another research study revealed that no negative articles were prepared about the main advertisers in three Lithuanian dailies in 2004-2006 (Transparency International, 2007; Nastaravičius, 2006).

Indeed, international research studies demonstrate that media owners do have far reaching influence on journalistic content through the economic strategies and newsroom organization. Decision-making process in the newsroom is of critical importance, and important selection criterion here is the editorial line and how it is de-

termined. So far, in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia mainly illustrations of commercial media instrumentalization can be found. As a result, certain levels of self-censorship proliferate in the Baltic media, which, interestingly enough, has a new character. While in the Soviet times self-censorship meant preconceived resignation not to discuss specific issues in public (except of those written in Aesopian language), today it means an adjustment of journalists to a particular situation which is more comfortable financially. The fear of losing their job pushes many journalists to follow the instructions they receive from their managing editors. In addition, traditionally liberal wage system that is maintained in many newsrooms today is an instrument for owners to limit journalists' independent choices and professional autonomy. In fact, journalists protest against the influences: for example, when the Lithuanian news agency ELTA was bought by the Respublika media group, the majority of ELTA journalists left their jobs and claimed that the new owners tried to make influence on the content. In 2007 the director general of the radio station *Žinių radijas* Vaidotas Žukas lost his job because, as he claimed, he refused to make an interview with Augustinas Rakauskas, the president of Senukai Corporation and the owner of the radio station.

Having an internal freedom is one of the most fundamental requirements for democratic media. The absence of editorial autonomy is a manifestation of a media system that has not yet been fully separated from the existing political or economic system. Although the chief editors claim that they usually do not feel (nor exercise by themselves) any direct pressures from

² In this section, extracts from the text prepared by Auksė Balčytienė and Eglė Naprytė for the „Media Democracy Monitor project“ were used. Full text is available at: http://www.nccr-democracy.unizh.ch/nccr/knowledge_transfer/ip19.

(on) external actors, in 2007, the Transparency International Lithuanian Chapter reported on a research study about the level of corruption in the Lithuanian mass media. According to the research data, 13 percent of the businessmen, who participated in the survey and who dealt with the Lithuanian media in 2005-2006, said they paid money to the media for publishing of positive materials or suppressing negative information. No significant differences were noticed among different media types. Usually respondents claimed they bribed the press; national TV channels are described as less corrupt than regional ones, while the Internet portals seem to be the least corrupt. A discussion on how free the Internet media is can easily become a controversial issue. It is necessary to take into account that journalism is a social phenomenon. It is a subject to change along with the changes within advertisement market and views of political establishment. To say it popularly, it is quite easy to keep high morals in the Internet media if it does not have really tempting (and indecent) proposals.

In this context, another important aspect of the Baltic journalism must be mentioned here, namely, weak journalistic professional norms and signs of clientelism observed through journalists' relationships with their political (or economic) news sources. Although this may be a "natural" outcome related to the question of proximity: in a small market journalists' relationship with sources is built differently than in a large market (often in a small country only a limited number of sources are available for journalists to comment on a particular political or economic matter). In spite of the effects of proximity, the Baltic political

communication culture certainly contrasts with the situation in the Scandinavian countries (which are also considered small markets), where journalistic professionalism and editorial independence are emphasized as essential elements of the Democratic Corporatist Model (as discussed in Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

One more observation in the Baltic newsrooms is that there are no formal procedures on how to involve journalists in decisions on personnel or editor in chief choices. If effective rules would exist in this regard, it would be more likely that democratic freedom would be guaranteed in media organizations and thus democracy (editorial and journalistic autonomy) would be promoted. In most cases the chief editor is appointed by the owners or the director of the media company. Exceptions may happen: for example, once in Lithuania journalists of a free daily *15 min* were asked to suggest a candidate. Normally, selection of new journalists is done by the chief editor or the head of the news department; sometimes other employees are involved into this decision making process, usually they are the ones taking high positions in the newsroom.

To conclude, the media laws prohibit any pressure on journalists to air false or biased information; they oblige media to protect individual rights, human dignity and privacy. The laws also provide for general principles on how information should be presented to the public, including requirements for unbiased, accurate information, diversity of opinions and so forth. However, there are neither legally binding commitments, nor solid professional norms to ensure editorial independence in the Baltic media.

Labile professional norms³

In Lithuania, the main regulatory tool for editorial policies in media is the Code of Ethics for Journalists and Publishers, approved by the Lithuanian Journalists Union in 1996. The Code sets basic requirements for news reporting, ethical standards and protection of individual privacy. It also speaks about the relations between journalists and owners, and among journalists themselves. The Code was amended in April 2005 to include provisions on transparency of information, hidden advertising and the rights of private individuals and minors. Journalists are obliged by law to protect and respect the right to privacy; they must not include personal data when covering suicides or suicide attempts and must not propagate or attractively depict smoking, drinking or the use of drugs. Such topics can be covered only when needed for the realistic presentation of various issues. However, this hardly changed the real situation in the Lithuanian media. Most of recent decisions made by the ethics custodians were primarily related to violation of privacy and protection of minors. As claimed by journalists, they do adhere to the principles of the Code of Ethics. Nevertheless, it is a regular practice that in some organizations there are no formal means that would oblige journalists to follow this requirement.

Understanding of the watchdog role is weak among the Lithuanian journalists. The main functions of journalism described by the media professionals are ranging from

informing the public to serving audience interests. Thus, the control of the powerful is taken into account as much as it interests their readers or listeners. In free dailies, the informational style is dominating and serious political issues are avoided. At the same time, journalists and editors describe the watchdog role as one of the most important functions of the media, but the biggest priority is given to the mission of informing society and presenting the biggest scope of various opinions. As one can notice, in these answers the locus of news is clearly pulling away from politics and seeking a more immediate connection to the everyday life of individuals: journalists claim that it is important to report news which has tangible consequences for ordinary citizens. This kind of journalism takes a keen interest in public opinion (who reads and watches what) and refers to the process of secularization which 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 more fragmented and individualized society. It may also be noticed that some media representatives have a varied understanding of the watchdog function. For example, the chief editor of the daily *Kauno diena* and the head of the radio news department at the public service broadcaster related it with the presentation of a concrete author's opinion towards certain actualities. By contrast, the chief editor of the tabloid *Vakaro žinios* claimed that articles of investigative journalism are published everyday on the second and third pages of the newspaper. However, these publications could be described as usual articles and certainly not as examples of

³ Some parts of the text in this section were prepared by Auksė Balčytienė and Eglė Naprytė for the „Media Democracy Monitor project“ (http://www.nccr-democracy.unizh.ch/nccr/knowledge_transfer/ip19).

investigative journalism. The same results are also noticed in Estonia as well as in other East Central European countries where journalists seem to lack a clear understanding of their watchdog role. In many cases, coverage of political scandals, presented by the newspapers as investigative journalism appears to be simply leak-driven reporting (Lauk, 2008).

Even though investigative journalism is a significant tool to control the powerful, the mainstream media do not regularly engage into such activities. Lack of financial and human resources are the most frequently mentioned drawbacks to carry the functions. Although some cases can be found (the public service broadcaster attempts to provide conditions for an investigation, also some regional dailies), nevertheless, the majority of the news media do not allocate neither additional time nor money for the promotion of investigative journalism. In order to be able to prepare high quality news not only about national but also foreign affairs, news media need to have foreign correspondents. However, the majority of the news media have no full-time employees abroad.

To conclude, a number of economic factors – market-led reforms, commercialization of content, changes in the job market – have created new challenges for journalists. At the same time it has also disclosed potential weaknesses of the profession such as weak norms and professional ideals. Producing news as fast and as cheap as possible seems to become a fundamental logic in the news media organization. Cheap and hybrid content proliferates in the mainstream media which operates under strong commercial impetus. Hybrid content helps to grab attention and deliver audiences

to advertisers (which fits the needs of a fragmented society). In other words, cheap production confirms compatibility of such journalism to media organizational goals. Journalists gradually anticipate more mixed journalism which is treated as a commodity, and which in turn supports the trend toward cheaper media production in contrast to in-depth and investigative reporting. Thus, in favour of expanding profit margins the media is gradually abandoning the public service mission of journalism.

In fact, independent journalist associations play an important role in improving skills and raising ethical standards. In Lithuania, two such organizations exist: Lithuanian Journalists' Union and Journalists' Association. The number of their members is respectively 800 and 100 journalists. Having in mind that in general there are around 3000 journalists in Lithuania (4000, if counting those who work on honorarium bases), then members of these organizations form approximately one third (or one fourth) of all journalists. The number of the members of professional organizations differs a lot across different news media. In some media organizations all journalists belong to the Lithuanian Journalists' Union; in other news media they comprise from zero to one third of all newsroom employees. In general, Lithuanian Journalists' Union is not strong, but it performs its functions at least partially. The union regularly organizes trainings on the basis of the needs expressed by the profession. Over recent years, the biggest attention has been paid to the regional media and trainings in online reporting and editing, newsroom management and journalism ethics. In media industry, professional

trainings are carried out on irregular basis (a more structured trainings are offered by the public service broadcaster). In addition to in house trainings offered by media organizations, training and education of journalists at university level should also play a significant role in setting certain standards for professionalization. In spite of the fact, that the majority of professionals poorly rate journalistic education (professional education is contrasted with experience or inborn talent), the percentage of journalists who are educated in this field is quite high. The majority of journalists conclude that practical skills are more important than special education for a good journalist. Finally, unclear rules and practices of career path development is another obstacle in media professionalization.

In Lithuania, two institutions are involved in handling complaints on media performance, namely the Ethics Commission of Journalists and Publishers and the office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics (both institutions established in 1996). On the one hand, the existence of this duality should help the citizens (e.g. the Inspector represents the public by observing the implementation of the law – his office works like a “safeguard” of public interest, thus in this aspect it is a replica of the Swedish model). On the other hand, the system is quite confusing for an average citizen. Ethics Commission of Journalists and Publishers (the Commission) is a self-regulation institution, while the office of Inspector of Journalists’ Ethics is more a regulatory instrument. The Commission mainly deals with journalists’ ethics and the main document on which it bases its decisions is the Ethics Code, while the office

of the Inspector observes how the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public functions as well as adherence to the regulation according to the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information and others laws. A problematic issue is the dilemma faced by the citizens: to whom complaints have to be addressed. Indeed, the two institutions are cooperating – if a case is unclear or deals with the matter of the other office, it can be forwarded to another office. Anyway, for the citizens it is unclear who is doing what and who is responsible to make a decision in the end. In this respect a bigger transparency on both institutions is needed as well as media literacy needs to be promoted already at a school level to increase public awareness of the media matters.

Discussion

Despite the differences in histories of journalism development there is a possibility to analyze the development in media systems as a process of convergence and hybridization. As mentioned, there are certain external influences and global trends how media systems and news journalism are developing worldwide as a result of, for example, market reforms, technological changes, secularization of society and so on. These have led to what has been identified as a tendency towards liberalization or “Americanization” of the media (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001; Hallin and Mancini, 2003). At the same time, although these developments signal towards commonalities in media marketization, these seem to be insensitive to contextual particularities such as nuances of historical development and national traditions. In this respect,

further analysis and discussion on media democratic performance in national contexts seems to be justified.

In spite of clear differences in the characteristics of media democratic performance, comparability of the Baltic media developments to the changes in a broader region of the North East European countries seems to be justified. The Nordic countries have always treated the Baltic States as belonging to the same informational space. For example, immediately after the political breakthrough, corporatist ideas promoting social partnership ideals were imported by their Baltic neighbours (this is reflected in the systems of media self-regulation both in Lithuania and Estonia). Also, the Nordic owners were very keen to expand their markets to the other side of the Baltic Sea. With Schibsted, Bonnier, Orkla, Modern Times Group, Alma Media and the others, new hopes appeared in the Baltic States that media owners from the Nordic countries would transfer high journalistic standards to small neighbouring markets. However, the “export” of professional culture did not happen naturally; foreign companies first of all are concerned with profits rather than issues of socially responsible and professional journalism (Balčytienė and Lauk, 2005; Lauk, 2008; Dimants, in this volume).

Briefly, in the past two decades in the Baltic countries the democratic media consolidation developed alongside the creation of news market and a dual media system. As discussed, in the Baltic States the construction of the new media landscape had to start almost from scratch and the laws adopted were generally liberal in character. Although media developments are moving in similar directions in many countries, both

regions – the Nordic and the Baltic – are struggling with media commercialization in their own way. Nordic countries have cherished the ideal of social responsibility as part of the media system attached to the Nordic model (the so called Democratic Corporatist Model), thus press freedom and pluralism find themselves realized as professional ideals even in the context of severe competition (Nord, 2008; Roppen, 2008). On the other side of the Baltic Sea, the new democracies have taken a leap towards the market-led model without a period of development towards such accountability (without any favors towards social accountability), thus their media performance (as a result of weak professionalism and labile professional norms) manifests very controversial practices (such as cheap media dominating in public discourse).

Indeed, by examining Baltic media characteristics one can find the “Eastern European”, “Northern” and “unique Baltic” references. Traditionally, media scholars position the three Baltic States together with the other post communist East European countries into one cluster (Jakubowicz, 2008). This is a valid decision: although media performance in the Baltic countries manifests clear differences from the features used to describe, for example, professional journalism culture in Poland where journalism traditions were not totally destroyed by the previous regime (Hadamik, 2005), certainly, these countries do have obvious commonalities, such as their late democratization, weak market (and at the same time very rapid economic growth followed by severe inflation), weak rational-legal authority, etc. As discussed in this article, the Baltic media systems have evolved

on the basis of the lessons learned from the Nordic countries (where democratic corporative and social responsibility traditions are strong), as well as neo-liberalism ideals. Therefore these systems can broadly be described as quite mixed examples with diversified and competitive media, institutionalized self-regulation, but low profes-

sionalism ideals, lack of internal media freedom and weak media accountability. To conclude, it seems that media cultures in the Baltic States represent highly mixed models with mainstream commercial and public service media each functioning with their own principles and professional journalistic norms.

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APIE TREJOPĄ BALTIJOS ŠALIŲ ŽINIASKLAIDOS TAPATYBĘ IR JOS POVEIKĮ ŽINIASKLAIDOS ELGSENAI

Auksė Balčytienė

S a n t r a u k a

Šiame straipsnyje taikomas lyginamasis žiniasklaidos tyrimų aspektas ir atskleidžiama, jog Lietuvos, Latvijos ir Estijos žiniasklaida savo šalių skaitytojams siūlo įvairių informacijos pasirinkimo galimybių. Taip pat, atkreipiamas dėmesys ir į tai, kad Baltijos šalys vienos pirmųjų jaunos demokratijos valstybių sėkmingai institucionalizavo žiniasklaidos savitvarkos sistemas. Tačiau nepaisant šių pozityvių slinkčių žiniasklaidos sistemų ir turinio įvairovės link, visuomenės informavimo praktika šiame regione ne visuomet tarnauja

demokratijos tikslams. Žiniasklaidos priemonės gan dažnai tarnauja politikos ar verslo interesams. Taip pat, šiame straipsnyje išvardijami iš kitų Šiaurės Europos regiono šalių žiniasklaidos sistemų „pasiskolinti“ dalykai ir aptariamos autentiškosios žurnalistikos savybės. Straipsnis užbaigiamas nuomone, jog Baltijos šalių žiniasklaida yra labai kontrastinga: čia veikia įvairialypė – tiek komercinė, tiek ir visuomenė – žiniasklaida, kurios priemonėms būdinga sava darbo logika bei taikomos žurnalistinės normos.